



## Analyzing the Geopolitical Consequences of Afghan Refugees in Iran

Mahmood Rashnavaz<sup>1w</sup>, Saleh Salavarzi Zadeh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>. Corresponding Author, Ph.D. Candidate in International Law, Islamic Azad University, UAE Branch E-mail [m.rashnavaz@iaau.ac.ae](mailto:m.rashnavaz@iaau.ac.ae).

<sup>2</sup>. Ph.D. in International Relations and Lecturer at Islamic Azad University, Abdanan Branch - Ilam - Iran.

<sup>3</sup> Scientific, research paper of the Ministry of Education, Grade B, with ISC grade, which converts the quarterly journal to Grade A.

# Analysis of Geopolitical Developments The Migration of Afghans to Iran

IRAN

AFGHANISTAN



National Security



Social and Cultural Impacts



Economic Effects



Foreign Relations and Diplomacy



Regional Transformations



Capacity Building in the Region

## Analyzing the Geopolitical Consequences of Afghan Refugees in Iran

Mahmood Rashnavaz<sup>✉1</sup> , Saleh Salavarzi Zadeh<sup>2</sup>

1. Corresponding author, Ph.D. Candidate in International Law, Islamic Azad University, UAE Branch. E-mail: [m.rashnavaz@iau.ac.ae](mailto:m.rashnavaz@iau.ac.ae)
2. Ph.D. in International Relations and Lecturer at Islamic Azad University, Abdanan Branch, Ilam, Iran.

### Article Info

**Article type:**  
Research Paper

**Article history:**

Received: 16 December 2025  
Received in revised form: 27  
January 2026  
Accepted: 24 February 2026

**Keywords:**

Afghanistan,  
Iran,  
refugees,  
international refugee law,  
Swot,  
migrants.

### ABSTRACT

The massive migration of Afghans to Iran, one of the world's longest-running displacement crises, is rooted in Afghanistan's ongoing conflict, economic instability, and environmental challenges. Iran has hosted millions of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers for more than four decades, and before the massive deportations of 2025, their population was estimated to be around 4.5 to 6 million. This phenomenon has created legal, economic, social, cultural, and psychological complexities. The research question is: What opportunities and threats has the massive and sometimes illegal presence of Afghan refugees created for Iran? The research is based on the hypothesis that this migration brings economic and cultural opportunities, but also exacerbates security and economic threats. This descriptive-analytical study, using a SWOT model, examines the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Its innovation is the integration of the SWOT model with international refugee law (1951 Convention, 1967 Protocol) and the integration of psychological-social-cultural dimensions into opportunities and threats. The findings show that migrants provide cheap labor in key sectors, create cultural richness from shared bonds, and offer social resilience. However, pressure on resources, various political-economic tensions, mental health problems, and cultural mismatch have posed serious threats to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Cite this article:** Rashnavaz, M.; Salavarzi Zadeh, S. (2025). Analyzing the Geopolitical Consequences of Afghan Refugees in Iran. *New Geopolitics Research*, 2 (2), 131-149.

© The Author(s).

Publisher: Lorestan University.



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22034/nrpg.2.2.8>

## **Introduction:**

Human mobility is one of the persistent realities of human history, shaped by various factors such as armed conflicts, economic crises, and the search for better life opportunities (Esses et al., 2017: 385). In recent decades, migration has become a major global challenge due to its increasing scale and complexity. Afghanistan, because of more than four decades of continuous conflict and political instability, has been one of the largest sources of forced migration in the world. The Islamic Republic of Iran has hosted millions of Afghan migrants and refugees for more than four decades and has experienced one of the longest urban refugee-hosting situations globally (Abbasi-Shavazi, 2016: 35). Prior to the large-scale expulsions of 2025, the Afghan population in Iran was estimated to be between 4 and 6 million people.

Migration is often conceptualized as movement from a place of origin to a destination, or from the place of birth to another location across international borders. For instance, measuring global bilateral migration flows is often based on movement from a country other than one's usual place of residence for at least one year, such that the destination country becomes the migrant's new usual place of residence. The consequences of migration are often not predetermined due to various stages of uncertainty that may arise, which can discourage the motivation for relocation. When a host society receives forced migrants (asylum seekers and refugees), it is often unprepared to accept new arrivals due to the need to protect its limited shared resources within its territory, such as land, water, housing facilities, natural and mineral resources. Migrants frequently face challenges of acceptance by host communities, leading to difficulties in collective integration, harmonious living, trade, cultural practices, religious beliefs, language barriers, agricultural methods, economic activities, social integration, livestock herding, and more. Conflicts between host communities and migrants can consistently undermine social cohesion and contribute to various forms of social degradation. Afghanistan is one of the countries in the world with the highest levels of emigration due to internal conflicts experienced over the past forty years, which have resulted in economic crisis and poverty. Afghans have been continuously migrating abroad for about 50 years. Although conflict and security issues are the main drivers of Afghan migration, they are often closely linked and inseparable from economic factors. The Islamic Republic of Iran has hosted one of the largest and longest-standing urban refugee populations in the world and has provided refuge to displaced persons for more than four decades (Abbasi-Shavazi, 2016: 37). Half a century after the Soviet invasion in 1979 and the subsequent waves of violence, displacement from Afghanistan remains the longest-standing refugee situation under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Most Afghan displaced persons and migrants reside in Iran and Pakistan. In Iran, thanks to progressive and inclusive government policies, refugees have access to educational, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities. It is estimated that a very high percentage of refugees in Iran live in cities, towns, and rural areas alongside the Iranian host community (UNHCR, 2025a).

This study, using a descriptive-analytical approach, seeks to answer the research question of what opportunities and challenges the large-scale and, in some cases, undocumented presence of Afghan migrants has created for the Islamic Republic of Iran?

## **Theoretical Foundations**

### **A. Definition of Concepts and Theoretical Framework**

- Migrant : There is no universal and legal definition of a “migrant.” According to the Office of the “United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights”<sup>1</sup> in line with its mandate to promote and protect the human rights of all individuals, a migrant is defined as “any person who is outside a State of which they are a citizen or national, or, in the case of a stateless person, their country of birth or habitual residence.” Accordingly, the term “migrant” is used to describe a group of people who share the condition of not holding citizenship in their host country (OHCHR, 2025: 1).

- Refugee: In international law, a refugee is precisely defined as a person who flees persecution or conflict in their country of origin. As noted above, there is no precise and universally accepted definition of a migrant. It is important to emphasize that refugees are entitled to full protection under refugee law, including protection against expulsion or return (refoulement) to situations of persecution where their life and freedom would be at risk (OHCHR, 2025: 1).

- Migration: Migration refers to the voluntary or involuntary movement of individuals to a new country where they intend to reside for an extended period (Esses et al., 2017: 385).

### **Theoretical Link between Migration and Political Geography (Geopolitics)**

Migration is not only a socio-economic phenomenon but also a geopolitical instrument that shapes international relations, regional power dynamics, and political tensions. From the perspective of geopolitical theories, migration can function as a “soft weapon” or a destabilizing factor, where migratory flows are used to exert political or economic pressure on host or origin countries (Öztürk, 2023: 248).

Migration systems theory argues that migration occurs within geopolitical systems in which states are interconnected through economic, political, and cultural ties. Within this framework, migration can either strengthen or weaken these linkages (Castles & Miller, 2009: 27–30). In the context of Iran–Afghanistan relations, regional geopolitics and border dynamics (such as the role of the Taliban and sanctions against Iran) have transformed migration into a tool of diplomatic bargaining (Siavoshi, 2024: 212). The “geopolitics of fear” theory frames migration as a “security threat,” in which media narratives and policy discourses portray migrants as sources of instability, thereby intensifying both domestic and international tensions (Pain, 2009: 470). In the context of climate change, forced migration resulting from drought in Afghanistan generates geopolitical risks for Iran, including pressure on borders and resources (McLeman, 2014:

---

<sup>1</sup> OHCHR

145). These theories suggest that Afghan migration to Iran is not merely a humanitarian issue but also a geopolitical one, requiring a strategic approach to managing tensions and leveraging potential opportunities.

## **B. Research Background**

Kakar (2026), in a study titled “Forced Return of Afghan Refugees,” examines the large-scale deportation of Afghans from Iran (over one million people since July 2025) within the framework of economic and security pressures. From the author’s perspective, this process intensifies the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, increases border tensions, and highlights the need for international cooperation to prevent regional instability. Siavoshi (2024), in the article “Afghans in Iran: The State and Migration Policy Performance,” argues that since its establishment in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has hosted one of the largest Afghan migrant/refugee populations in the world. To explain Iran’s migration policies and their evolution over time, the study addresses two interconnected questions: first, how and why these policies were formed, and second, to what extent the state maintains control over such consequential policies.

Mohseni et al. (2024), in a study titled “Identification of Health-Related Quality of Life Components in the United Nations Afghan Refugee Camp in Fars Province, Iran: A Qualitative Study,” examine the health and healthcare situation of Afghan migrants in Iran and the factors influencing it. The study identifies key barriers such as lack of financial resources, social obstacles, and cultural and ethnic issues. Unemployment, low income, inflation in Iran (partly due to recent sanctions), and limited access to necessary medicines are among the major obstacles to improving healthcare quality for migrants.

Hosseini and Jahandideh (2022), in a study titled “How Do Shared Experiences of Economic Shocks Affect Refugees and Host Communities? Evidence from Afghan Refugees in Iran,” use survey data from both Iranian citizens and Afghan refugees in Iran during 2011–2019 to examine the unequal effects of macroeconomic fluctuations resulting from Iran’s nuclear-related economic conditions on Afghan refugees and host communities.

Moghadam and Jadali (2021), in their article “Migration and Revolution in Iran: Refugee Policy and State Consolidation,” analyze the Islamic Republic of Iran’s refugee policies in relation to Afghan migrants. They note that in May 2019, statements by then Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi suggesting that Iran might ask Afghan nationals to leave the country sparked widespread criticism across different segments of Iranian society.

Yellinek (2021), in an article titled “The Politics and Geopolitics of the Afghan Refugee Crisis,” links Afghan refugees to the geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China, identifying Iran as the main host country (with more than 3 million Afghans). The study highlights that Afghan migration from Iran to Turkey and Europe has turned Iran into a transit hub, which may benefit Iran’s regional rivals and affect regional geopolitical stability.

Crawley (2022), in a study titled “Between a Rock and Hard Place: Afghan Migration from Iran to Europe,” draws on interviews conducted in Turkey and Greece during the last three months of 2015 to examine the experiences of Afghans who migrated from Iran to Europe, many of whom had lived in Iran for years and, in some cases, were even born there.

Modrzyńska-Leśniewska (2020), in her study “Afghan Migrants in Iran in the Contemporary Era,” discusses Afghan migration to Iran since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The author argues that the situation of Afghan migrants has continuously changed depending on Iran’s domestic and international position. Based on available analyses, it can be concluded that the status of Afghans in Iran has been strongly influenced by Iran’s political conditions and the decisions of Iranian authorities. At the same time, due to the difficult conditions in Afghanistan, Afghan migrants often find themselves in a precarious situation and are effectively compelled to remain in Iran.

Bjerre Christensen (2016), in the article “Iran’s Fluctuating Policies toward Afghan Refugees in the Aftermath of Sanctions and Regional War,” argues that, on the one hand, Iran should be acknowledged for its “state support and public services for Afghans,” which is described as “unprecedented” compared to other countries hosting millions of refugees. In particular, the recent policy of expanding free education for undocumented Afghan children represents a significant advancement. On the other hand, the study notes that Iran has also deported hundreds of thousands of Afghans.

In Pakistan and Turkey, which are among the largest hosts of Afghan refugees, comparative analyses of responses to refugee flows and sustainable solutions to protracted displacement show an initial policy of open borders followed by increasing restrictions due to economic and security pressures. In Jordan and Lebanon, research on Syrian refugee hosting policies highlights economic, social, and political challenges, where pressure on public resources and social tensions resemble the situation of Iran with Afghan migrants (Altındağ et al., 2020: 12).

In contrast to previous studies that have mainly described Iran’s policies or focused solely on economic and social consequences, the main innovation of the present research lies in establishing a systematic link between the international legal framework of refugee protection (the 1951 Refugee Convention and the principle of non-refoulement) and a strategic SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. This linkage, which has not been previously integrated in a comprehensive and operational manner, for the first time makes international law the central benchmark for evaluating Iran’s national migration strategies.

## **Methodology**

This research is qualitative in nature and adopts a descriptive–analytical approach. The main objective is to conduct a strategic analysis of the policies and approaches of the Islamic Republic of Iran toward Afghan migrants and asylum seekers during the period 1979–2025 (1358–1404 SH), using the SWOT model.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of the SWOT framework with the international refugee law framework (the 1951 Geneva Convention, the 1967 Protocol, and the customary *jus cogens* principle of non-refoulement), which has been operationalized here for the first time in a systematic manner.

The data collection method is entirely documentary and library-based, relying on credible secondary sources. The study population includes the set of Iranian migration policies, laws, and official decisions regarding Afghan nationals, as well as the estimated population of more than four million Afghan migrants and refugees.

Sampling was conducted using a purposive (non-probability) approach, and only sources with high scientific, official, or institutional credibility were selected. Data analysis was carried out qualitatively using the SWOT model. The four components of the model (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) were evaluated against international legal criteria.

The analytical process also included a comparative assessment of migration policies in similar host countries, particularly Turkey and Pakistan. Validity was ensured through data triangulation (multi-source, multilingual, and multi-institutional references), while reliability was achieved through precise citation of original sources, page numbering, and the reproducibility of the analytical steps.

### **International Refugee Law as an Operational Basis for SWOT Analysis**

Strategic management refers to the formulation and implementation of goals and initiatives undertaken by top-level managers of an organization based on available resources and an assessment of the internal and external environment in which the organization operates. Strategic management can be designed as a set of theories and frameworks supported by tools and techniques to assist managers in strategic thinking, planning, and action.

Strategic planning is a process aimed at mobilizing organizational resources (in this context, states) and aligning their efforts to achieve long-term goals and missions, taking into account internal capacities and external constraints (Karami & Salavarzizadeh, 2025: 173).

SWOT analysis is a technique used to examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of an organization or country. SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. It is a framework that helps structured thinking and planning, ensuring that no “blind spots” remain undiscovered later (Omer, 2018: 28).

Strategies	Threats	Opportunities	External Internal
	$S + T = ST$	$S + O = SO$	Strengths
	$W + T = WT$	$W + O = WO$	Weaknesses

(Source: Karami and Salaverzizadeh, 2023: 170)

This research, for the first time, transforms the legal framework not as a separate descriptive section, but as the backbone and the evaluative benchmark of the four components of the SWOT model. Within this conceptual framework, the study first addresses the internal strengths and weaknesses of Iran in relation to Afghan migrants. Subsequently, after presenting a historical overview of migration as a phenomenon, international migration law, and the beginning of Afghan migration to Iran, the analysis focuses on the opportunities and threats posed by the presence of these “uninvited guests” for the host country, namely Iran.

## Research Findings

### International Law: Refugees and Migrants

The international legal framework governing refugees and migrants is primarily established through key treaties and conventions that define the rights and protections of displaced persons. This section analyzes these instruments. The two main subcategories of migrants are “refugees,” who cross international borders in search of peace and security, and “asylum seekers,” who seek international protection without yet having their refugee status formally determined (Patel et al., 2021: 1469).

-1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees : The cornerstone of international refugee law is the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which defines who qualifies as a refugee and outlines the legal protections, rights, and obligations of states toward them. Specifically, Article 1(2) of the Convention states that a “refugee” is a person who is outside their country of habitual residence and is unable or unwilling to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. This Convention has been ratified by 145 member states and establishes a global standard for the treatment of refugees. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is considered the foundational instrument of international refugee law, defining who is eligible for refugee status and granting them legal protection (Anh & Nguyen, 2024: 2).

-1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees: To address the evolving nature of refugee crises, the 1967 Protocol was adopted, removing the temporal and geographical limitations originally established in the 1951 Convention. This amendment was particularly significant in the context of post-colonial refugee movements and allowed for a broader interpretation of who qualifies for refugee status. The Protocol has also played a crucial role in ensuring that refugee protection applies universally, regardless of when or where individuals flee their countries of origin (Robert Bosch Stiftung and Migration Policy Institute, 2021).

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): Beyond the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, human rights instruments such as Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (the right to seek asylum) and the two Global Compacts of 2018 (the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration) emphasize the necessity of international cooperation and shared responsibility (Owen & Scougall, 2025: 1). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), through its interpretive guidelines, has expanded the scope of protection to include gender-based persecution and climate-induced displacement. With more than 20,300 staff operating in 136 countries (as of December 2023), the agency's core mandate is to protect, assist, and find durable solutions (voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement in third countries) for refugees, forcibly displaced persons, and stateless individuals (Chiarenza et al., 2019: 2). These mechanisms are essential for states in addressing the complexities of contemporary forced migration.

-International Frameworks and National Policies: National laws and policies regarding refugees and migrants play a vital role in shaping the protection and rights granted to displaced populations. While international legal frameworks establish general principles, their implementation at the national level varies significantly across countries. In this regard, several general principles related to migrants and refugees, as well as state policies, are highlighted below.

1 .Principle of Non-Refoulement: One of the fundamental elements of refugee protection is the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits states from returning individuals to a country where their life or freedom would be threatened. This principle applies to all migrants, regardless of their immigration status, and is rooted in obligations under international law that states must observe within their territories. The norm of non-refoulement has evolved to emphasize that states are responsible for actions taken within their borders and to strengthen their duty to protect individuals seeking asylum (Chapela et al., 2020: 5). Establishing non-refoulement as a binding obligation under the Refugee Convention also implies that any state party may bring a violator before the International Court of Justice. This enhances the enforceability of the obligation and increases the likelihood of protecting individuals fleeing persecution in an unstable global socio-political context (Khatan & Krishan, 2022: 1).

2 .Domestic Legislative Frameworks: States often incorporate international conventions into their domestic legal systems to regulate the treatment of refugees. For example, the Cartagena Declaration and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention establish parameters for refugee protection, linking it to broader concepts of public order and human dignity. However, the effectiveness of these frameworks can be undermined by national laws that impose additional barriers on asylum seekers, particularly in industrialized countries that may lack sufficient resources to provide adequate protection (Elnakib et al., 2024: 13). In the United Kingdom, recent legislative changes, such as the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, have introduced stricter measures for asylum seekers, including those displaced for various reasons, highlighting the

challenges of aligning national policies with humanitarian principles. In contrast, there are ongoing calls for reforms aimed at strengthening protection mechanisms while addressing contemporary migration challenges (Moezzi et al., 2024: 5).

3 .Integration Policies; International Obligations and National Discretion:The integration of refugees into national systems is a vital aspect of domestic policy. However, the integration agenda is often influenced by a top-down approach primarily shaped by international organizations and high-income countries. This has resulted in gaps in the implementation of effective integration strategies, particularly in regions hosting a significant number of refugees (Hansen and Hathaway, 2015: 238).

While international humanitarian law provides a framework for protecting displaced persons during armed conflict, national governments retain discretion regarding how these obligations are implemented. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court outlines crimes against humanity that may be applicable in refugee-related contexts, but the enforcement of these principles largely depends on national legal systems. The interaction between international obligations and domestic policies creates a complex landscape for refugees, making ongoing dialogue and reform essential to ensure that rights and protections under international law are upheld at the national level (McDonnell, 2023: 17).

#### 4 .Formation of the Afghan Migration Phenomenon; Periods and Causes

##### First Period: Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on December 27, 1979 (6 Dey 1358), marked a major turning point in the Cold War, launched to support the communist government of the People's Democratic Party against the Mujahideen insurgency. This intervention, widely condemned internationally, led to more than a decade of attritional war (1979–1989) that devastated Afghanistan's infrastructure, economy, and social fabric. As a result, over 6 million Afghan refugees fled mainly to Pakistan and Iran, while millions more were internally displaced. The United States, through "Operation Cyclone"—the largest covert CIA operation in history—provided billions of dollars in weapons and financial aid to the Mujahideen, which further prolonged and intensified the conflict (Shvangiradze, 2023: 1).

The Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the subsequent civil war paved the way for the emergence of the Taliban between 1994 and 1996. The legacy of this invasion is still visible today in ongoing instability, a severe refugee crisis, widespread human rights violations—particularly against women—and persistent challenges in refugee integration (Schoch, 2008: 7).

##### Second Period: Soviet Withdrawal, Civil War in Afghanistan, and the Rise of the Taliban

After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, nearly 4 million Afghans returned to their country, but the fall of Najibullah's government in 1992 triggered a devastating civil war among Mujahideen factions (Dashti, 2022: 306). In 1994, the Taliban emerged in Kandahar and, under the promise of security, captured Kabul and most of the country by 1996. They

banned music and television, deprived girls of education and women of work (except for medical staff), and severely repressed the Hazara minority (Ruiz, 2004: 1).

United Nations sanctions and the severe drought of 1998–2001 caused widespread famine; by 2000, more than one million people were internally displaced, and a new wave of refugees flowed into Pakistan and Iran (Ministry of disaster management, 2021). This period marked the second wave of mass migration and one of the most painful chapters in Afghanistan's history (Mujda, 2003: 19).

### Third Period: September 11 and the United States Invasion of Afghanistan

Following the September 11 attacks, the U.S. intervention in 2001 overthrew the five-year Taliban regime. Between 2002 and 2008, more than 4.3 million Afghans—the largest return in history—came back from Pakistan and Iran, although many returned with hopes of a better life (Verduijn, 2020: 1). From 2005, the Taliban re-emerged; widespread corruption, billions of dollars in lost aid, unemployment, and severe poverty deepened public frustration. In 2014, with NATO withdrawal and intensified attacks, a new wave of displacement began. Families once again packed their belongings; in 2011, Afghanistan became the second-largest source of refugees in the world after Syria. The homeland they had eagerly returned to once again became unbearable for millions (Sajjadi, 2018).

### Fourth Period: United States Withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 and the Return of Taliban Rule

During the second Taliban period, the Kabul government collapsed approximately three weeks after the announcement of the full withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan on July 22, 2021, and fell into Taliban control. Thus, after twenty years, the Taliban regained power in Afghanistan for the second time in their history. With the Taliban's takeover, Afghanistan's migration crisis intensified once again, and hundreds of thousands of Afghans, for security, economic, and political reasons, embarked on migration paths. The rapid advance of the Taliban and the escalation of violence in the country created another mass migration crisis among the Afghan population, leading to renewed movement toward neighboring countries such as Iran (UNHCR, 2021).

## 5 .Iran and Afghan Migrants; Policies, Opportunities, and Threats

Afghanistan has been characterized over the past half-century by significant population displacement, primarily driven by conflict and economic instability. The Soviet invasion in 1979 was a turning point that led to the mass migration of Afghans, particularly toward neighboring countries such as Iran. In the 1980s and early 1990s, approximately three million Afghans settled in Iran, seeking better economic opportunities and escape from ongoing violence. Following the Taliban's return to power, more than 10,000 legal and illegal Afghan migrants entered Iran daily. While figures of 10 to 15 million Afghan migrants reported on some Iranian social networks appear exaggerated, the Afghan migrant population in Iran is substantial and potentially constitutes one-tenth of Iran's total population. Rising birth rates among Afghan families and declining trends among Iranians have raised concerns among Iranian policymakers regarding the country's long-

term demographic composition. The provinces of Tehran, Khorasan, Sistan and Baluchestan, Kerman, Yazd, and Fars in eastern and central Iran host the largest populations of Afghan migrants (Jalali, 2024: 7).

## **Policies**

Iran's migration policy toward Afghans has lacked a long-term program and has consistently been dependent on the immediate conditions and priorities of decision-makers. National interests and social stability have always been the main focus. Afghan migration to Iran began in the 1850s (Hazara people in Torbat-e Jam) and was later institutionalized under Reza Shah with the classification of "Khawari." After the 1979 revolution, policies fluctuated in response to domestic and international developments and have never moved beyond a reactive framework (Bareach, 2021: 12). The policies of each presidential period are reviewed separately below.

### **-Open Door Policy 1979–1993:**

The initial policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran toward Afghan refugees (1979–1992) was an "open-door" approach. From 1979 to 1992, most arrivals were granted an "blue card," which guaranteed legal unlimited residence and access to subsidized healthcare, free education, and basic goods (Rajai, 2009: 47). Unlike Pakistan, which placed more than 90% of refugees in camps, Iran hosted fewer than 3% in camps, while the majority lived in urban areas alongside Iranians; Afghan children continue to attend free public schools to this day. Following the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, millions entered the country. The end of the Iran–Iraq War and the beginning of the Afghan civil war (from 1989 onward) created a new wave of arrivals, and Afghans played an important role in Iran's reconstruction.

### **-Presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani:**

During Hashemi Rafsanjani's presidency (1989–1997), following the end of the Iran–Iraq War, Afghans became a key source of cheap labor in the country's reconstruction. However, from the early 1990s, policies shifted toward restriction: the issuance of permanent residence documents was halted, limited temporary cards were issued, and illegal entry was declared prohibited from 1992 (Bavili, 2023: 4828). Access to free education was restricted to the city of registration, and employment limitations were imposed. The government began identifying and deporting undocumented individuals. The daily cost of supporting approximately two million Afghans in 1994 reached 10 million dollars, while international assistance remained minimal; since 1985, UNHCR had only provided aid to camps, leaving 95% of Afghans living in cities and rural areas without assistance (Herve, 2018). This situation forced Iran to reconsider its generous policies, while the main burden of hosting refugees remained on the state.

### **-Khatami Era:**

During the presidency of Khatami, there were intense debates over whether Afghans should be deported to their home country. Unemployment increased during this period,

and Afghans were often portrayed as a cause of job shortages. In parliament, discussions were held regarding the deportation of Afghans. As a result of internal economic and social concerns, refugee policy shifted toward emphasizing the prevention of illegal entry and the return of Afghan refugees. Iran made repeated efforts (often in cooperation with the UNHCR) to register and document Afghans in preparation for their return; it implemented several deportation campaigns; gradually reduced services for Afghans (especially education and healthcare); and imposed employment restrictions. However, these policies had little impact on the number of Afghans in Iran, which remained at 2.1 million in 2001 (Sadeghi, 2005: 17).

#### -Presidency of Ahmadinejad:

Ahmadinejad's distributive policies continued during this period. His priority was improving social justice within Iranian society. With his administration coming to power, indirect subsidies were replaced with direct subsidies. Iranian citizens received a specific amount of money for gasoline as direct subsidies; however, Afghans living in Iran did not have access to these direct subsidies that were provided to Iranian citizens. The agreement signed between Iran, Afghanistan, and the UNHCR in 2002 was revised in 2003 and 2004, and between 2004 and 2006, approximately 1.5 million migrants left Iran. The "Comprehensive Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration, and assistance to host countries" remained the main regional framework for joint interventions aimed at identifying and implementing durable solutions and providing support to host countries (Bavili, 2023: 4830).

#### -Presidency of Rouhani:

During the presidency of Rouhani, Iran adopted a pragmatic strategy to support a democratic and multi-ethnic Afghanistan. Iran viewed its engagement in Afghanistan as "an opportunity to enhance its regional role in line with the promotion of national interests at various levels and domains." Iran was also under the most severe sanctions (Gramo Hugo, Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, Rasul Sadeghi, 2012). It should also be noted that sanctions intensified social tensions and negative perceptions of Afghans among Iranians, portraying them as a security threat. With increasing pressure from the United States' "maximum pressure" policy, Iranian policymakers added to domestic pressure to reduce state benefits for Afghans. In a statement in July 2014, the Rouhani government announced that all ministries, organizations, and state-owned companies should only employ Iranian workers. During Rouhani's presidency, deportations of Afghans from Iran increased (Herve, 2018).

#### -Presidency of Martyr Raisi:

During the presidency of Raisi, the provision of basic services to Afghan refugees was on the government's agenda, although Iranians themselves were under sanctions and faced severe shortages of essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-pandemic economic crisis. The presidency of Martyr Ebrahim Raisi (2021–2024) was the most tense period in Iran's migration policy toward Afghans and witnessed the highest

volume of migrant inflows. This period coincided with the fall of Kabul and the return of the Taliban to power in August 2021, which created a massive wave of migration. According to statistics, more than 1 million new Afghans entered Iran after 2021, bringing the total population to around 5–6 million.

The Raisi government initially adopted an organizing approach: a large-scale census was conducted, and about 2.6 million people were issued temporary documents to regularize their legal status. The provision of basic services (education, healthcare) to legal migrants continued, although under the pressure of sanctions and the economic crisis (Bavili, 2023: 4831).

-Presidency of Pezeshkian:

Masoud Pezeshkian played an important role during his tenure in shaping policies and approaches toward Afghan migrants in Iran. His approach to migration and refugee issues was closely linked to Iran's socio-political context, which, due to ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, witnessed a significant influx of Afghan nationals. During this period, Iran's migration policies fluctuated between granting temporary work permits and implementing mass deportations (Mashwani, 2025). During his electoral campaign, Masoud Pezeshkian announced three strategies for organizing Afghan migrants in Iran:

1 .Full border closure and prevention of further migration, with the Ministry of Interior taking primary responsibility.

2 .Organization of existing migrants. It should not be denied that a large number of Afghan brothers have played an important role in Iran's economy or have made sacrifices during the imposed war; however, their presence in Iran must be organized and regulated.

3 .Negotiation with European countries to accept part of the migrants (or at least bear the costs of their presence in Iran). The West must accept responsibility for what it has done in Afghanistan, which has led to the migration of millions of Afghans. There is no reason for the Iranian people to bear the costs of others' incorrect policies (Fararu Website, June 13, 2024).

## **Discussion**

Application of SWOT Analysis to the Afghan Migrant Phenomenon in Iran: An Integrated Approach with a Focus on International Refugee Law

The analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in this study is not merely used as a managerial tool, but as a strategic framework for assessing the compliance of Iran's national policies with its international refugee law obligations (1951 Geneva Convention, 1967 Protocol, and the customary principle of non-refoulement). This application, for the first time, moves international law from the margins to the center of strategic analysis and evaluates its four pillars based on objective legal criteria (Cu et al, 2023: 3).

Internal Strengths:

The most important strength of Iran is its long-term practical commitment to the principle of non-refoulement. Despite not being an official party to the 1951 Convention, the Islamic Republic of Iran has, over four and a half decades, with the exception of limited security-related cases, refrained from forcibly returning Afghan asylum seekers to areas where their life or freedom would be at risk. This behavior, beyond formal legal obligations, has evolved into a customary commitment and has placed Iran at a higher level of human rights credibility compared to Turkey and Pakistan (Siavoshi, 2024: 212). This strength constitutes a strategic asset for negotiating with the international community and attracting financial and technical assistance (Nasrollahi, 2017: 5).

#### Internal Weaknesses:

Iran's non-membership in the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol represents the most fundamental structural weakness. This legal status has deprived Iran of formal cooperation mechanisms with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and global refugee funds, placing nearly the entire financial burden of hosting the longest refugee crisis in modern history (from 1979 to the present) on the Iranian state and society (Bavili, 2023: 4829). This structural inequality has pushed domestic policymaking toward reactive and tension-driven approaches (Hosseini & Jahan Dideh, 2022: 20).

#### External Opportunities:

The Global Compact on Refugees (2018) and the principle of shared responsibility have created an unprecedented opportunity for Iran. Iran can, while maintaining its geographical reservation (similar to the Turkish model), conditionally enter formal cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and benefit from new global funding mechanisms. Ongoing negotiations (2023–2025) between Tehran and Geneva indicate the feasibility of this strategy. Annual access to 500 million to 1 billion USD in international assistance, reduction of pressure on the public budget, legalization of Afghan labor and its transformation into a productive economic resource, and ultimately the reduction of social tensions are among the most important outcomes of this strategic opportunity (Moradian, 2025: 10).

Afghan migrants, sharing the Dari-Persian language and the Shiite faith, provide a unique opportunity for cultural exchange in areas such as art, cuisine, music, and traditions. This cultural proximity can enrich Iran's cultural mosaic and strengthen regional solidarity (Jalali, 2024). Furthermore, the presence of second- and third-generation Afghans born and raised in Iran creates an opportunity for deeper cultural integration. This generation often holds a dual identity that can serve as a bridge between the two societies (Abbasi Shavazi et al., 2016: 38).

#### External Threats:

The continuation of mass deportations without individual assessment of each case constitutes a clear violation of the principle of non-refoulement, which is recognized in

international law as a peremptory norm (*jus cogens*) with *erga omnes* obligations. The deportation of more than 1.2 million people in 2023 and 2024 without individual refugee status determination creates a legal basis for any state party to the Convention to bring a case before the International Court of Justice (Nasr Esfahani, 2024: 7).

The large and partly uncontrolled presence of Afghan migrants may also have significant implications for the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Within the framework of “securitization theory,” Qasemy shows that Iranian official institutions, given geopolitical pressures, sanctions, and instability in the eastern borders, have assessed Afghan migration as potentially linked to risks such as weakening of sovereign control, increased vulnerability of internal security, and the possibility of exploitation by external actors. From this perspective, restrictive and control-oriented policies are justified as tools for maintaining stability (Qasemy, 2025: 983–992).

On the other hand, high concentrations of migrants in certain cities may, from policymakers’ perspectives, be associated with increased petty crime, pressure on urban services, and the emergence of social tensions—issues that are framed in official discourse as soft and social security threats (Zandi-Navgran et al., 2023: 45).

Moreover, in conditions of instability in Afghanistan, large-scale migration may increase the risk of spillover insecurity, smuggling, and cross-border illegal activities, compelling the host state to adopt stricter security-oriented approaches (Safdar et al., 2023: 214–218).

Overall, these studies indicate that from the perspective of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s national interests, strict and security-based migration management is understood and justified as a strategy for maintaining public order, social cohesion, and internal stability.

#### Proposed Strategies Based on the SWOT Model:

To present operational strategies based on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the presence of Afghan migrants in Iran, the SWOT model is applied. These strategies are designed to maximize strengths, address weaknesses, capitalize on opportunities, and mitigate threats.

In the SO (Strength–Opportunity) strategies, the focus is on leveraging the inherent strengths of Afghan migrants, such as their availability as abundant, low-cost, and hardworking labor in key economic and cultural sectors. Iran can utilize this capacity by establishing formal registration and labor absorption programs for migrants, particularly in agriculture, construction, and services, to respond to the acute demand for labor in these sectors. Providing short-term vocational and technical training would increase their productivity, reduce production costs, and contribute to economic growth. At the same time, given the deep cultural and linguistic similarities between the two countries, strengthening cultural and social ties through festivals, joint handicraft exhibitions, and cultural exchange programs can enrich Iran’s social diversity, enhance mutual

understanding, gradually reduce existing prejudices, and transform migrants into a positive cultural asset and a tool of regional soft diplomacy.

In the WO (Weakness–Opportunity) strategies, the aim is to address the weaknesses resulting from the large migrant population by utilizing available opportunities. Pressure on natural resources, urban infrastructure, and public services is one of the main challenges, which can be managed through the balanced distribution of migrants across the country, particularly in less populated provinces and rural areas.

The ST (Strength–Threat) strategies focus on using Iran’s strengths to counter external threats. Given the high capacity of the human workforce and existing security technologies, strengthening border surveillance through the installation of smart cameras, online monitoring systems, and intelligence cooperation with neighboring countries and international organizations can significantly reduce illegal entry, human trafficking, and related security threats.

In the economic dimension, the labor capacity of Afghan migrants can also be directed toward reducing pressure on the Iranian labor market by supporting their entrepreneurship in handicrafts, small-scale agriculture, and local services. The creation of joint Iranian–Afghan cooperatives and the provision of targeted credit facilities would generate bilateral employment opportunities and transform negative competition into positive cooperation.

Finally, the WT (Weakness–Threat) strategies address the simultaneous reduction of weaknesses and threats. To reduce social, cultural, and ethnic tensions between migrants and the host society, the design and implementation of mandatory educational programs in schools and public institutions, along with the creation of continuous spaces for cultural dialogue in mosques, neighborhoods, and social centers, can reduce prejudice and strengthen social cohesion.

These strategies, in an integrated and descriptive manner, make the sustainable management of Afghan migration flows possible. They can maximize economic and cultural opportunities while minimizing security, social, and economic threats.

Analytical Pillar	International Legal Standard (1951 Convention + 1967 Protocol + Principle of Non-Refoulement)	Actual Situation of Iran	Strategic Implication for Iran
Strengths	Customary adherence to the prohibition of forced return (non-refoulement) even without formal membership in the Convention	Over 45 years, less than 2 percent of expulsions have constituted a clear violation of this principle (UNHCR, 1403/2024)	Greater legal credibility → leverage in negotiations with the international community to obtain annual financial assistance amounting to several hundred million dollars
Weaknesses	Non-membership in the 1951 Convention → deprivation of global financial assistance and formal cooperation	Iran spends more than 8 billion dollars annually, but less than 3 percent of it comes from international aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1403/2024)	Heavy financial burden and domestic dissatisfaction → reactive and tension-generating policies
Opportunities	Possibility of conditional accession to the Convention (like Turkey) + Global Compact on Refugees 2018 + principle of shared responsibility	Ongoing negotiations between Iran and UNHCR for a comprehensive durable solutions program (1403–1405 / 2024–2026)	Attracting 500 million to 1 billion dollars annually in aid → reducing budgetary pressure → organizing the labor force
Threats	Collective expulsion without individual assessment → violation of the principle of non-refoulement → possibility of filing a complaint before the International Court of Justice	Expulsion of more than 1.3 million people in the years 1402–1403 (2023–2024) without individual assessment	Serious damage to Iran's global standing at a time when it needs regional diplomacy and sanctions relief

(Source: Authors)

## Conclusion

Based on the SWOT model and the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the presence of Afghan migrants in Iran, the findings of this study indicate that the large-scale presence of Afghan migrants in Iran—one of the longest and most complex migration phenomena in the world—has brought both specific opportunities and challenges. Over the past forty-five years, Iran has managed to host millions of Afghan migrants without social collapse and, despite significant pressures, has remained committed to humanitarian principles such as non-refoulement. These characteristics represent important national strengths in managing this crisis.

However, due to Iran's non-membership in the 1951 Geneva Convention and the absence of a structured legal framework for managing migrants, the country has been deprived of international assistance and has consequently borne substantial financial and social

burdens alone. These weaknesses have contributed to the gradual erosion of existing human capital and growing public dissatisfaction.

At the same time, Iran faces new global opportunities that could significantly improve the management of Afghan migration. Conditional accession to international refugee frameworks, access to financial assistance from global institutions, and the transformation of Afghan labor into a formal and productive component of Iran's economy are among these opportunities. Such measures could help reduce pressure on public and social resources while turning Afghan labor into an economic advantage for the country.

Nevertheless, serious threats also exist. Mass deportations of Afghan migrants without individual case assessments not only intensify internal tensions and create social crises but may also damage Iran's international standing and cause diplomatic repercussions in sensitive contexts. In particular, in the economic and social spheres, the lack of proper organization and comprehensive policy-making may lead to serious challenges in cultural and social interactions.

Given these findings, the most effective strategy for Iran is to utilize existing humanitarian experience in migrant reception, strengthen international cooperation, and join global refugee regimes. In particular, by organizing the status of migrants and facilitating their constructive participation in Iranian society and economy, this major challenge can be transformed into an opportunity for sustainable development and enhanced regional stability.

### **Acknowledgment**

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all those who assisted us in writing this article, as well as to the journal staff and the respected reviewers.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

### **References**

Zandi-Navgran, Leila et al. (2022). "Understanding Migrants' Perception of Social Distance from Iranians: A Qualitative Study among Afghan Migrants." *Strategic Research on Social Issues*, 11(4), 1–26.

Abbasi-Shavazi, Mohammad Jalal, Sadeghi, Rasoul, and Mohammadi, Abdullah. (2016). "To Stay or to Re-migrate: Return Migration of Afghan Migrants from Iran to Their Home Country and Its Determinants." *Journal of Demographic Studies*, 2(1), 119–150

Karami, Jahangir and Salaverzizadeh, Saleh. (2023). "Strategic-Foresight Analysis of the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran toward Turkmenistan." *International Relations Research*, 13(2), 171–202.

Mohseni, Roghieh, Bazrafkan, Leila, Shakerpour, Nasrin. (2024). "Identification of Health-Related Quality of Life Components in Afghan Refugee Camps in Fars Province: A Qualitative Study." *Iranian Journal of Health Sciences*, 12(3), 185–194.

Altındağ, O., Bakış, O., & Rozo, S. (2020). Blessing or burden? Impacts of refugees on businesses and the informal economy. *Journal of Development Economics*, 146(12), 10-20.

Anh, Q. H. (2024). Are 'climate refugees' compatible with the 1951 Refugee Convention?. <https://www.e-ir.info/2024/08/13/are-climate-refugees-compatible-with-the-1951-refugee-convention/>.

Bareach, K. U. (2021). Iran Afghanistan relationship in historical perspectives [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Balouchestan, Balouchestan.

Bavili, N. (2023). Analyzing Iran's policies towards Afghan asylum seekers through the lenses of public choice theory. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 6(8), 4826–4832.

Bjerre Christensen, J. (2016). Guests or trash: Iran's precarious policies towards the Afghan refugees in the wake of sanctions and regional war. (11 ed.) Danish Institute for International Studies. DIIS Report1, 12(2), 23-38.

Bojorquez-Chapela, I., Flórez-García, V., Calderón-Villarreal, A., & Fernández-Niño, J. A. (2020). Health policies for international migrants: A comparison between Mexico and Colombia. *Health Policy OPEN*, 1, Article 100003,12(7), 123-145.

Chiarenza, A., Dauvrin, M., Chiesa, V., Baatout, S., & Verrept, H. (2019). Supporting access to healthcare for refugees and migrants in European countries under particular migratory pressure. *BMC Health Services Research*, 19(513), 23-35.

Crawley, H., & Kaytaz, E. S. (2022). Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Afghan Migration to Europe From Iran. *Social Inclusion*, 10(3), 4-14.

Elnakib, S., Jackson, C., Lalani, U., Nour, S., & Spiegel:(2024). How integration of refugees into national health systems became a global priority: A qualitative policy analysis. *Conflict and Health*, 31(12), 12-30.

Esses, V. M. (2017). Migration. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Political Behavior*,295),380-388.

Fararu News Website. (June 13, 2024). Pezeshkian's key decision regarding Afghan migrants in Iran. Available at: <https://fararu.com/fa/news>. [in Persian].

Habibi, D. H. (2025, March 11). Between inclusion and exclusion: Iran's selective instrumentalization of Afghan migrants. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/between-inclusion-and-exclusion-irans-selective-instrumentalization-afghan-migrants>.

Hathaway, J. C., & Gammeltoft-Hansen, T. (2015). Non-refoulement in a world of cooperative deterrence. *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, 53(2), 235–284.

Herve, N. (2018). Migration, displacement, and education: Building bridges, not walls. Inclusion of Afghan refugees in the national education system of Iran and Pakistan. Global Education Monitoring Report. UNESCO.

Hoseini, M., & Jahan, D. M. (2022). How do shared experiences of economic shocks impact refugees and host communities? Evidence from Afghan refugees in Iran (Policy Research Working Paper, 35(23), 23-34.

Human Rights Watch. (1991). Afghanistan: The forgotten war: Human rights abuses and violations of the laws of war since the Soviet withdrawal (Report No. 810).

Jalali, M. (2024). Narratives of pride: Afghan migrant laborers in Iran. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 12(39), 45-67.

Kakar, R. (2026). Forced returns of Afghan refugees risk triggering a humanitarian crisis – OpEd. *Eurasia Review*. <https://www.eurasiareview.com/26012026-forced-returns-of-afghan-refugees-risk-triggering-a-humanitarian-crisis-oped>.

Karami, Jahangir, & Salavarzizadeh, Saleh. (2023). "Strategic-Proactive Analysis of the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards Turkmenistan". *International Relations Researches*, 13(2), 171-202. [in Persian].

Khatan, P., & Krishan, J. (2022). The obligation of non-refoulement and its erga omnes partes character. *Harvard International Law Journal*. <https://journals.law.harvard.edu/ilj/2022/12/the-obligation-of-non-refoulement-and-its-erga-omnes-partes-character/>.

Kuschminder, K., & Dora, M. (2009). Migration in Afghanistan: History, current trends and future prospects.

Mashwani, N. (2025). Displaced and forgotten: Afghan refugees in Iran. <https://csspr.uol.edu.pk/refugees/>.

McDonnell, N. (2023). Falling through the protection gaps: Inappropriate protection of climate displaced persons in the international refugee legal structure. *The Transnational Human Rights Review*, 10, 1–22.

Ministry of Disaster Management. (2021). Drought [خشکسالی]. <https://andma.gov.af/dr/%D8%AE%D8%B4%DA%A9%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C>.

Mjaku, G. (2020). Strategic management and strategic leadership. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 10(8), 913–918.

Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, J. (2020). Afghan migrants in Iran in modern times. *Studia z Polityki Publicznej*, 7(4), 9–30.

Moezzi, S. M. I., Etemadi, M., Lankarani, K. B., & Joulaei, H. (2024). Barriers and facilitators to primary healthcare utilization among immigrants and refugees of low and middle-income countries: A scoping review. *Global Health*, 20(75), 67-80.

Moghadam, A., & Jadali, S. (2022). Immigration and revolution in Iran: Asylum politics and state consolidation. *REMHU: Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana*, 29, 21–41. [in Persian]

Mohammad, J. A.-Sh., Diana, G., Gholamreza, J., Mohammadian, H., & Rasoul, S. (2005). A study of Afghans living in Mashad. EC Stifting Vluchteling, UNHCR

Mohseni, R., Bazrafkan, L., & Shokrpour, N. (2024). Identification of the components of health quality of life in Afghan refugees' UN camp in Fars Province, Iran: A qualitative study. *Iranian Journal of Health Sciences*, 12(3), 185–194. [in Persian]

Moradian, Davoud. (1404). The Crisis of Afghan Migration and the Need to Revisit Iran's Policies. *Shargh Newspaper*. <https://sharghdaily.com/>.

Mujda, W. (2003). Afghanistan ve Panj Sal Seleteyi Taliban [Afghanistan and five years of Taliban rule]. Tehran: Nay Yayınları.

Nasr Esfahani, Arash. (2024). Arash Nasr Esfahani, sociologist and researcher: The social issues depicted in the image of migration threats exacerbate our challenges with Afghan migrants.

Omer, S. K. (2018). SWOT analysis - The tool of organizations stability (KFC) as a case study. *Journal of Process Management – New Technologies, International*, 6(4), 27–34.

Owen, C. H., & Scougall, B. (2025). Climate change and forced displacement: A case for refugee status.

Patel, P., Bernays, S., Dolan, H., Muscat, D. M., & Trevena, L. (2021). Communication experiences in primary healthcare with refugees and asylum seekers: A literature review and narrative synthesis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(4), 44-69.

Qasemy, A. (2025). Securitization, exploitation and temporization of Afghan immigrants and refugees in Iran. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 8(12), 983–992.

Qehaja, A., Berisha, K., Enver, P., & Justina, S. (2017). Strategic management tools and techniques usage: A qualitative review. *Acta Universitatis Agriculturae et Silviculturae Mendelianae Brunensis*, 65(2), 585–600

Rajai, B. (2009). The politics of refugee policy in post-revolutionary Iran. *Middle East Journal*, 54(1), 44–63.

Refugees, United Nations High Commissioner for. (2024). Figures at a glance. UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/figures-glance>.

Robert Bosch Stiftung and Migration Policy Institute. (2021). The Refugee Convention at 70: What does the future hold in an increasingly bordered world?. <https://www.bosch-stiftung.de/en/story/refugee-convention-70-what-does-future-hold-increasingly-bordered-world>.

Ruiz, H. A. (2004). Afghanistan: Conflict and displacement 1978 to 2001. <https://www.fmreview.org>.

Sadeghi, R. (2005). Study of Afghans living in Mashad. European Commission (EC) and Stichting Vluchteling, UNHCR.

Sadeghi, R. and Abbasi-Shavazi, M. J. (2016). Return Migration to Afghanistan or Staying in Iran among Afghan Youth. *Iranian Population Studies*, 2(1), 119-150.

Safdar, M., Chahar Mahali, A., & Scott, J. W. (2023). Border security, migration and state stability in West and South Asia. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 38(2), 211–225.

Sajjadi, A. (2018). *Siyaseti Harici Afganistan [Afghanistan's foreign policy]*. Kabul: Vaje Yayınları.

Schöch, R. (2008). Afghan refugees in Pakistan during the 1980s: Cold War politics and registration practice. *New Issues in Refugee Research*(157), 1–17.

Shvangiradze, T. (2023). 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan: The beginning of the USSR's end. <https://www.thecollector.com/soviet-ussr-invasion-afghanistan/>.

Siavoshi, S. (2024). Afghans in Iran: The state and the working of immigration policies. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 51(1), 209–223.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2025). Differentiation between migrants and refugees.

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Migration/GlobalCompactMigration/MigrantsAndRefugees.pdf>.

UNHCR. (2021). Şiddet artarken Afgan mülteciler İran'a ulaşıyor [Afghan refugees reach Iran as violence escalates]. <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/30095-afghan-refugees-reach-iran-as-violence-escalates.html>.

UNHCR. (2025a). Refugees in Iran. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/ir/refugees-iran>.

Verduijn, S. (2020). Destination unknown: Afghans on the move in Turkey [Bilinmeyen yön: Türkiye'de ilerleyen Afganlar]. MMC Middle East Research Summary.

Victoria, M., Wright, J. D., Clint, T., & Hamilton, L. K. (2017). Immigration. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Political Behavior*, 12(5), 380–388.

Yellinek, R. (2021, September 24). The politics and geopolitics of the Afghan refugee crisis. Middle East Institute. <https://mei.edu/publication/politics-and-geopolitics-afghan-refugee-crisis>.

Zandi-Navgran, L., Askari-Nodoushan, A., Afrasiabi, H., Sadeghi, R. and Abbasi-Shavazi, M. J. (2022). Migrants' Perception of Social Distance with Iranians: A Qualitative Study among Afghan Immigrants. *Strategic Research on Social Problems*, 11(4), 1-26.

Analyzing the geopolitical consequences

# of Afghan refugees in Iran

**Article**

**A quarterly scientific and research journal of  
the Ministry of Science, Technology and  
Innovation, Grade B, with ISC grade**

**The writer:**

**Mahmoud Rashnavaz**

[m.rashnavaz@iau.ac.ae](mailto:m.rashnavaz@iau.ac.ae)

**Doctoral student of International Law, Emirates  
Branch, Islamic Azad University, Dubai, UAE  
member of the center of lawyers, official experts  
and consultants of the judiciary**

2026/05/04