



# U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

# Afghan Refugees Pakistan and Iran



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# Goals for today:

- Brief overview of Afghanistan Relations with Pakistan and Iran
- Overview of Timeline
- Review Shifts in Refugee Populations
- Examine Pakistan's and Iran's response to Afghan Refugees
- Identify Risk Factors for Afghan Refugees
- Discuss Vulnerable Populations



# Research Challenges

## Political challenges

Host governments may refuse to document refugees in order to discourage further migration

Domestic political concerns may discourage enumeration of refugees, to preserve political balance

Refugees may be reluctant to become registered if registration will lead to repatriation or deportation

Corruption allows some refugees to illegally acquire host-country identification documents

## Logistical challenges

Lack of formal channels for asylum seeking leads to more illegal smuggling

Refugees increasingly move to urban areas instead of camps, where they are harder to identify

Refugees frequently move back and forth between countries - "flow" data is harder to track than "stock" data

High birth rates among refugee populations are often not taken into consideration

*Source: Academic publications*



# Historic and Cultural Factors Pakistan



# Historic and Cultural Factors in Iran

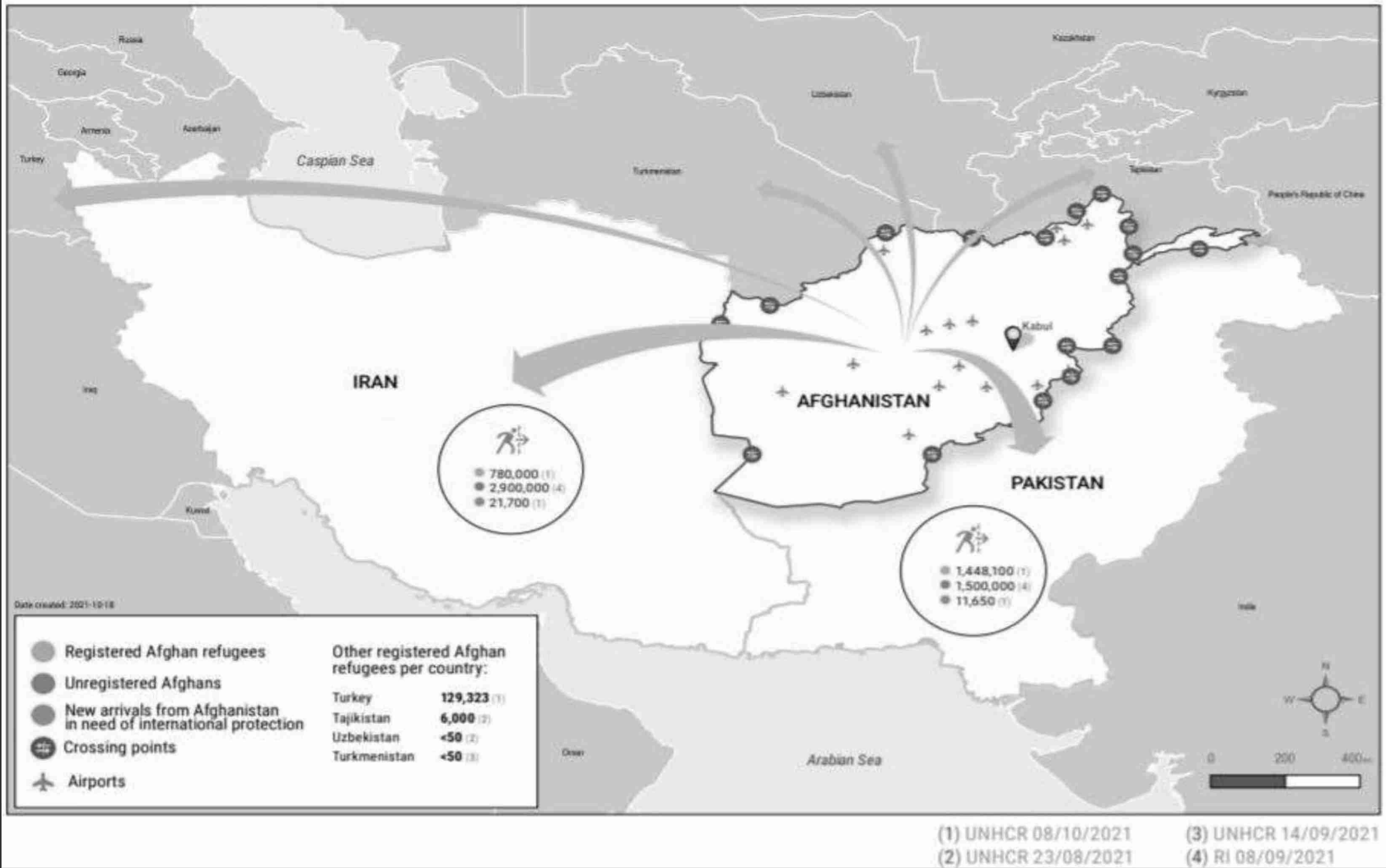
- Iran has a strong presence in Afghanistan but mostly unofficial:
  - Culture
  - Customs
  - Language (Farsi or Persian)
- Increased involvement after Soviet departure
- Supported mujahadeen groups
- Supported Northern Alliance against Taliban

[RAND Report: Iran's Influence in Afghanistan](#)



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# Migration routes from Afghanistan into neighbouring countries



# Timeline of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan/Iran

## 'First' Wave Migration

- 1979-
  - The first major wave of Afghan refugees enters Pakistan following the Soviet invasion.
  - 3.5 million to Pakistan
  - 2 million to Iran
- Both countries have "Open Door" Policies
- Considered "religious migrants"





# Timeline of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan/Iran

## 'Second' Wave Migration

- 1989- Soviet military withdraws from Afghanistan
- Shift in Refugee populations:
  - Supporters of the Soviet Union forced to leave Afghanistan
  - 2-3 million people returned to Afghanistan after the Soviet's left
- 1992 – Iran’s first repatriation program for Afghans organized with UNHCR
- Civil War erupted – 5 million Afghans left the country



# Timeline of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan/Iran

## 'Third' Wave Migration

- 1994- Taliban takes over based on strict Sharia Law
- Women, the educated, religious minorities, political moderates flee Taliban rule
- Another shift in refugee populations



# Timeline of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan/Iran

## 'Fourth' Wave Migration

- 2001: After 9/11 the US begins attacks on militant targets in Afghanistan, prompting a fresh wave of migration to Pakistan and Iran.
- 2002-2007: After the fall of the Taliban, the UNHCR assists 2.7 million Afghans to repatriate to Afghanistan from Pakistan. Iran pursues strict Afghan repatriation policies
- According to the agency, the 1.5 million who voluntarily went home in 2002 marked the single largest refugee return in the world since 1972. An estimated 1.1 million others return home independently, without UNHCR assistance.



# Timeline of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

- 2007-2012: Voluntary returns to Afghanistan decrease dramatically as a result of increased conflict in Afghanistan and a realization that there are few livelihood opportunities.
- 2014- 2016- In response to several deadly security incidents and deteriorating political relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan- Pakistan implements **National Action Plan 2014** to combat terrorism and extremism.
- Pakistani authorities drive Afghans out of the country.



# Timeline of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

- 2016 nearly 365,000 registered and 200,000 unregistered Afghans returned- Called forced return by Human Right Watch
  - Deportation threats
  - Police Abuses
  - Insecure Legal Status
  - Government announcements that all Afghans should leave
  - Exclusion from schools and society
  - [Human Rights Watch: Pakistan Drives Out Afghan Refugees](#)
- 2017- A 1,600-mile fence built by the Pakistani military now makes it harder to slip into Pakistan from Afghanistan.



# Timeline of Afghan Refugees in Iran

- 2007- Iran deported more than 100,000 undocumented Afghans
- 2010 – After a 3-year pause, Iran asked both documented and undocumented Afghans to return home within six months. And stated plans to repatriate 900,000 Afghan refugees by 2015
- 2013 – Iran recognizes Afghan refugees’ contribution to livestock and brick industries, pausing repatriation programs
- 2017 – Iran conducts a census specifically for undocumented Afghan population



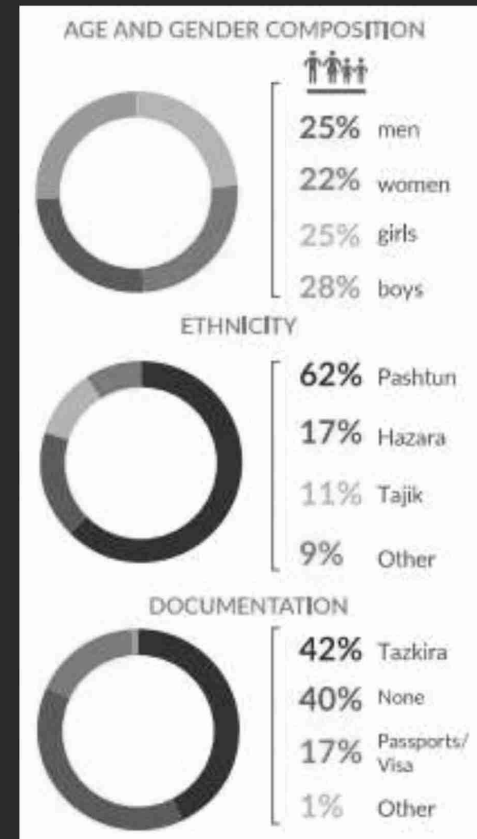
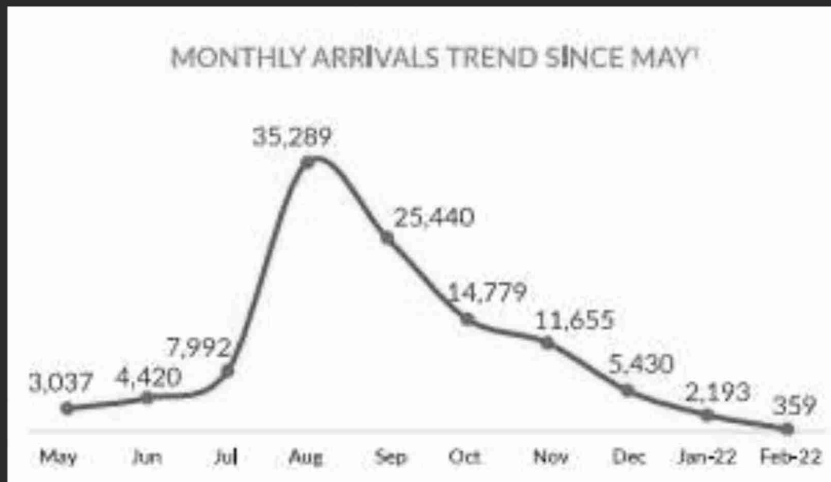
# Timeline of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan/Iran

- 2021- US withdrawals and Taliban take over as ruling government in Afghanistan
  - Hundreds of thousands of refugees flee to Pakistan
  - 400,000+ Afghans fleeing to Iran (~4,000 to 5,000 Afghans crossing into Iran each day)
- According to UNHCR, the land border with Pakistan has been mostly closed to Afghan nationals fleeing the country without a passport and visa, except for a few exceptions including people in need of medical treatment, or with a proof of residency.
- Most Afghans fleeing to Iran are doing so in an irregular manner through unofficial border crossings and with the help of smugglers, as official border points remain closed for entry to persons without valid passports and visas intending to seek asylum.



# Timeline of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

## UNHCR Pakistan- New Arrivals from Afghanistan February 2022



See also:

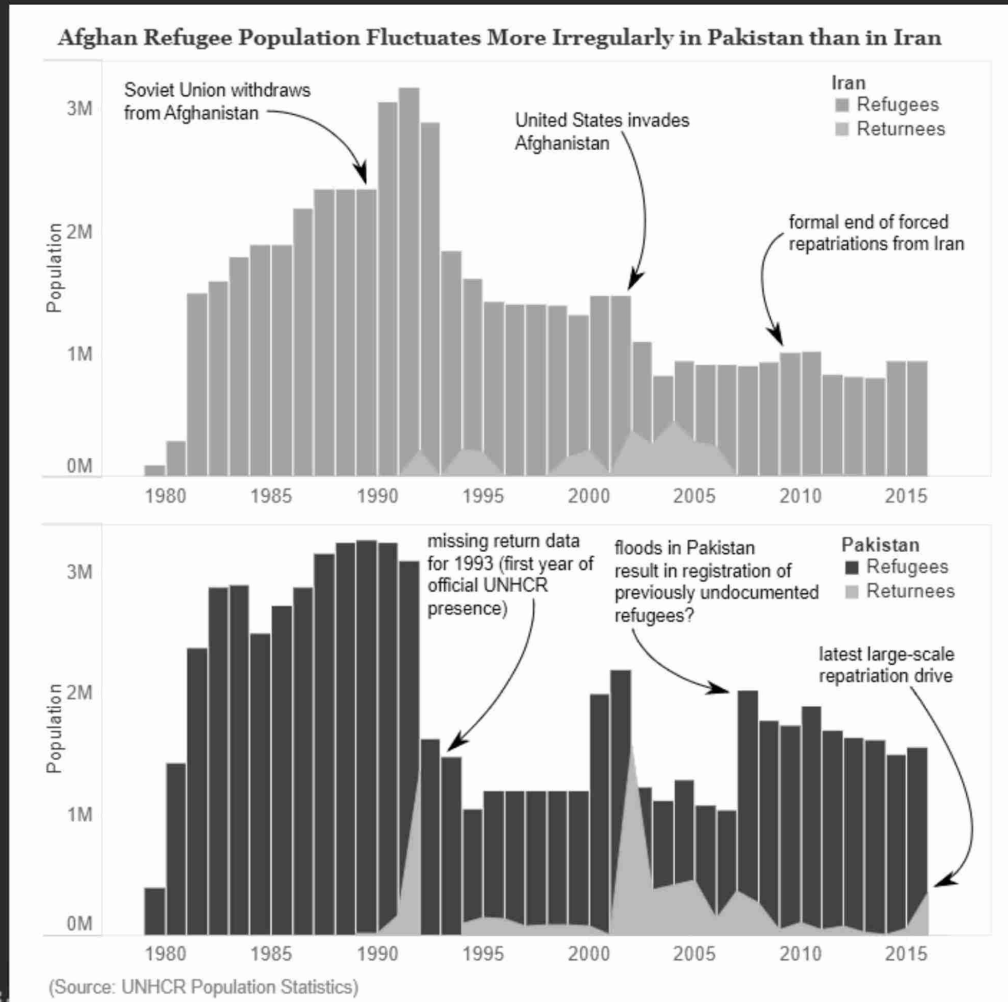
[Afghanistan Voluntary Repatriation Update February 2022](#)



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# Timeline of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan and Iran



# Risk Factors for Afghans in Pakistan



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# Afghans in Pakistan



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# Risk Factors Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

- August 27- September 9, 2021- Pakistani authorities deported 230 undocumented Afghans
- September 2021- Uncertainty after the Taliban seized power has helped create a backlog of deliveries, everything from onions to construction materials can wait days to cross the border.
- October 2021- Pakistani authorities to ease the movement of people and goods through official border points with Afghanistan.
- November 2021- UNHCR was still reporting continuous movement of largely undocumented Afghans crossing at irregular land borders. Reports of deportation.
- December 2021- 108,000 Afghans have arrived, 75% are women and children



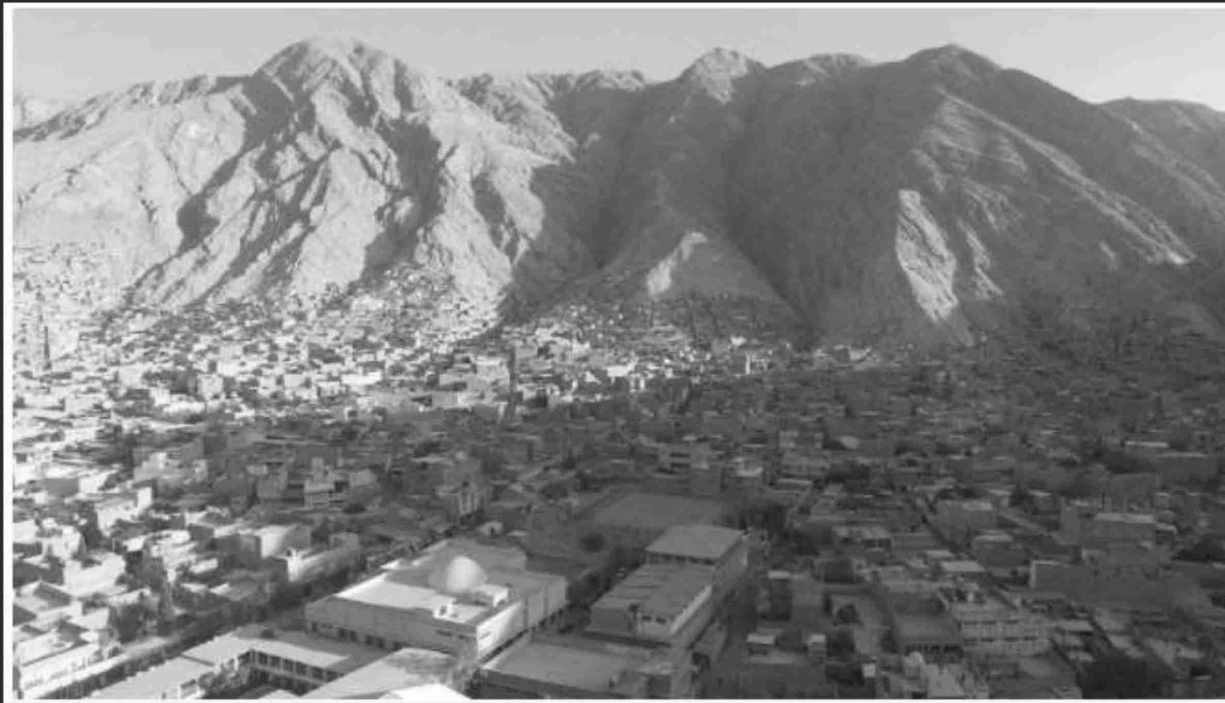
# Racial Profiling in Pakistan

- 2011- Pakistani officials claimed that 90% of terrorist activities could be traced back to refugee camps. Backlash against Afghan refugees
- Afghan Pashtuns
  - Report of profiling being used as part of the fight against terrorism and extremism



# Hazaras

- Hazaras- Estimated 600,000 to 1 million Hazaras in Pakistan
  - Considered "infidels" and "worthy of killing"
  - As of 2019- 2,000 Hazaras have been killed in Pakistan since 1999



# Arbitrary Arrest and Detentions in Pakistan

- December 16, 2014- Pakistani Taliban (Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan) attacked an Army Public School
  - Killed 145 people including 132 children
  - Afghan refugees largely blamed and targeted
  - Since then, Pakistani police have carried out raids on Afghan settlements, detained, harassed, and beaten Afghan men, extorted, and demolished Afghan homes.
  - Many returning to Afghanistan cited fear of Pakistani police as their reason to do so.
  - Pakistani authorities pushing Afghans to return home.
  - National Action Plan 2014- Pakistan



# Abuse in Prison/Detention Centers

<b>Country</b>	<b>Pakistan</b>
<b>Ministry responsible</b>	Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights
<b>Prison administration</b>	Governments of Provinces
<b>Prison population total (including pre-trial detainees / remand prisoners)</b>	88 687 <i>at 2021 (Federal Ombudsman Secretariat)</i>

<b>Foreign prisoners (percentage of prison population)</b>	1.2% <i>(30.6.2007)</i>
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# Lack of Legal Status for Pakistan-born Afghans

- Pakistan law grants citizenship to those born there however the government refuses to recognize claims of children of Afghans
- Receive Proof of Registration (PoR) cards which entitle them to freedom of movement and temporary protected status but carries no other rights
- May also hold an Afghan Citizenship Card (ACC) which provides legal protection from arbitrary arrest, detention, or deportation under the Foreigners Act 1946
  - Single males under 18 were excluded



# Lack of Legal Status for Afghan Refugees

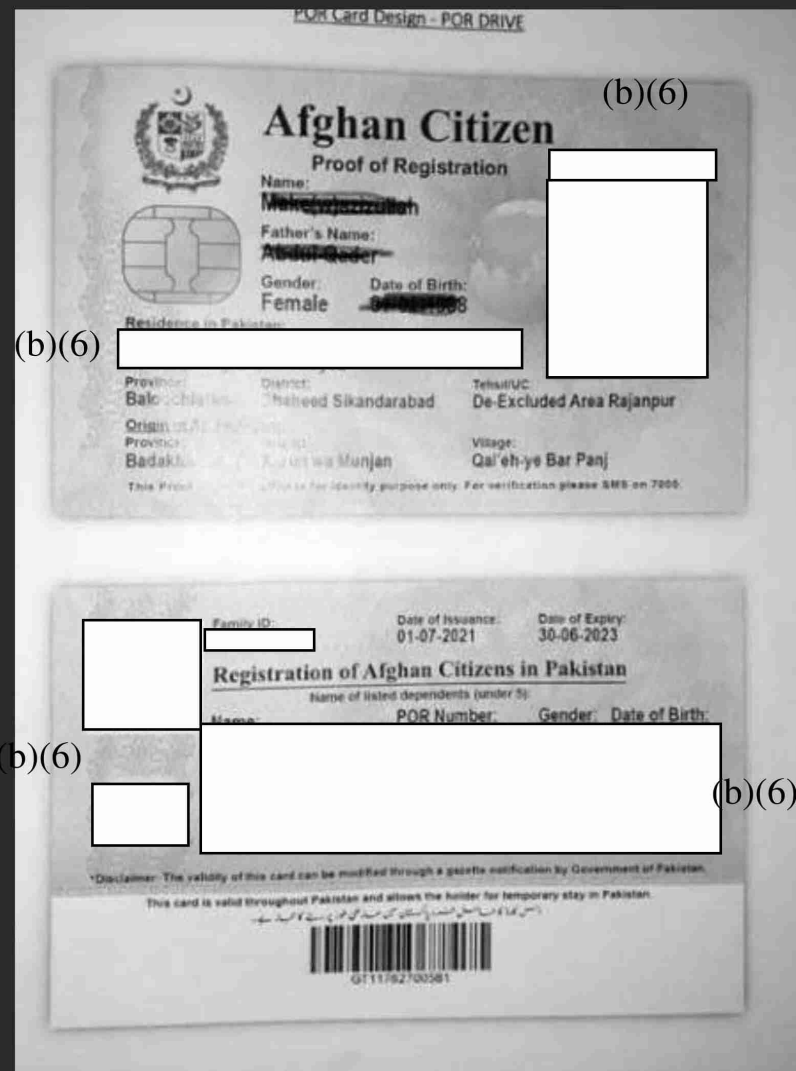
- **January 2022-** UNHCR commends Government of Pakistan for DRIVE – Documentation Renewal and Information Verification Exercise for the 1.4 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan
  - Smart Identity Cards
    - Valid until June 30, 2023
    - Contain biometric data and technologically compatible with systems to authenticate identities
    - Faster and safer access to healthcare, education, banking services, and increased access to aid
    - Ability to identify vulnerabilities



# Lack of Legal Status for Afghan Refugees



Examples found on open-source platforms



# Vulnerable Populations of Afghans in Pakistan



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# Men Recruited by Armed Groups in Pakistan

Madrassas- Religious Schools- Taliban/Extremist training

- 26 madrassas in Pakistan (2017)

Taliban:

- Taliban currently (2022) recruiting fighters from Pakistan to return to Afghanistan
- Returned fighters are believed to range from 5,000-10,000
- Recruitment efforts in Pakistan- Mosques, training camps, madrassas

TTP- Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan

The Evolution and Future of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan



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# Afghan Women in Pakistan

- Fearful of returning to Afghanistan- violence and child recruitment
- Isolation and desperation
- Pakistani media narratives designating Afghan refugees as security threat
- Lack of educational opportunities
- Lack of income generating opportunities
- Poor healthcare
- Lack of identification cards
- Lack of transportation and financial assistance



# Ethnic and Religious Minorities in Pakistan

- Hazaras are both ethnic and religious minority and face intersectional discrimination in Pakistan
- Restrictions on freedom of movement, education, and employment
- Hundreds of Hazara families have arrived in Quetta since the Taliban takeover in Kabul, most of them via human smugglers. Families which arrived in Quetta mostly include government servants, professionals and a few media personnel who worked in Kabul.



# Risk Factors for Afghans in Iran



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# Precarious Legal Status in Iran

- Shift in Iranian government's attitude after the 1990s has made Afghan refugees' legal status increasingly uncertain
- Steep fees for renewal and issuance of ID cards
- Second-generation Afghan refugees in Iran do not have path to citizenship
- Refugee identity card (Amayesh) is limited to a few basic rights to health care and education
- Increased school fees for children of Afghan refugees
- "No Go" areas where Afghans are not permitted to live



# Lack of Job Security in Iran

- Afghan refugees are viewed as threat to Iranian jobs
- In 2003, legislation was enacted that fined employers who hired Afghans without work permits, and prohibited renting accommodation to Afghan nationals, except to those who entered the country with a valid passport and visa and who had been issued residence permits
- Seasonal Afghan workers receive lower salaries than Iranian workers, do not have health insurance or a contract of employment, and can simply be fired at will
- Demand for seasonal workers has declined due to pandemic and economic downturn



# Forced Deportation & Abuse in Iran

- Afghan refugees fear being summarily deported regardless of legal status or time spent in Iran
- Detainees and deportees are often physically and verbally abused by Iranian government personnel
- Deportations are a result of economic stress as well as a form of leverage the Iranian government uses against Afghan government
- Afghan detainees are denied health care and coronavirus treatment
- [Afghan Refugees Face Deportation in Iran](#)
- [Human Rights Watch- Afghan Refugee and Migrants Face Abuse](#)



# Vulnerable Populations of Afghans in Iran



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# Afghan Men Recruited by Military

- Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) recruiting refugees – particularly Hazaras and other Shia minorities – to fight in Syria (Fatemiyoun Division)
- Some refugees are paid to fight (or offered other incentives), others threatened with deportation or arrest
- "Viewed as 'cannon fodder,' Fatemiyoun fighters were sent to some of the toughest fronts, including Latakia, Hama, Idlib, Aleppo, Damascus, and Daraa, resulting in outsized casualty rates"
- See Middle East Institute Report [Understanding the Fatemiyoun Division: Life Through the Eyes of a Militia Member](#)



# Afghan Women in Iran

- Lack of ante- and postnatal care due to financial constraints, cultural stigma, and discrimination
- Whatever work Afghan women are able to find is usually labor-intensive with long working hours and no maternity leave
- Afghan female detainees and prisoners severely abused
- High rates of illiteracy and lack of access to information
- Increased rates of domestic violence due to COVID isolation
- Exploring the Challenges of Afghan Refugee Women Facing COVID: A Qualitative Study in Iran- March 31, 2022



# Future of Afghan Refugees

## Afghans in neighbouring countries

Estimates of where Afghans displaced in 2021 could go



CBC NEWS

Source: United Nations High Commission for Refugees



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# Questions?



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