



Socio-Economic Dimensions of Afghan Refugees in India

¹Name of Ar. Swati Sharma , ²Dr. Suniti Sood

¹Assistant Professor , ²Associate Professor

¹Amity Institute of Design

¹Amity University Haryana , Gurugram, India

Abstract:

Afghan refugees in India have been living in the country for decades, with some even born and raised here. However, they still face a range of socio-economic challenges, such as lack of access to education, employment, and healthcare. This research paper examines the socio-economic dimensions of Afghan refugees in India. The study explores the challenges faced by Afghan refugees in India, including their legal status, employment, housing, education, healthcare, and discrimination. The research employs a qualitative methodology to collect and analyze data from Afghan refugees living in India, civil society organizations, and government officials. The study's findings highlight the significant challenges faced by Afghan refugees in India and the need for coordinated efforts from various stakeholders to address these challenges. The study also provides recommendations to address these challenges, which can be useful for policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders working to improve the lives of Afghan refugees in India.

Keywords - Refugees, Socio-economic, Discrimination .

I. INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan has been in a state of conflict for over four decades, which has resulted in the displacement of millions of Afghans. Many have fled to neighboring countries, including India, seeking refuge from the violence and persecution in their home country. India has been hosting Afghan refugees since the 1980s, and there are currently around 15,000 registered Afghan refugees in the country, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). However, many more Afghans may be living in India without registration.

Afghans in India has for years been home to refugees not only from its neighbouring countries but also from distant countries such as Iran, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan. However, it is neither party to the 1951 Convention on Refugees nor the 1967 Protocol. This lack of specific refugee legislation in India has led to a situation in which the status of refugees is governed mainly by political and administrative decisions rather than any codified model of conduct. Due to the very nature of this approach, the government treats various refugee groups differently. Some receive legal and socio-economic support from the government, while others are denied from basic social services. As there is no separate law in India outlining the rights of refugees, the government mainly deals with such according to the Foreigners Act 1946 and the Citizenship Act 1955, which are applicable to all foreigners in the country. This means that economic migrants and those who flee war, violence and prosecution are not differentiated in India.

Despite living in India for years, Afghan refugees still face significant socio-economic challenges, such as limited access to education, employment, and healthcare. This research paper aims to examine the socio-economic dimensions of Afghan refugees in India, with a focus on their education, employment, and health outcomes. The study also identifies the challenges faced by Afghan refugees in accessing these services and provides recommendations to address these challenges faced by this vulnerable population.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review provides a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by Afghan refugees in India. The study examines the existing literature on Afghan refugees in India and their socio-economic dimensions. The literature review highlights the various challenges faced by Afghan refugees in India, including legal status, employment, housing, education, healthcare, and discrimination.

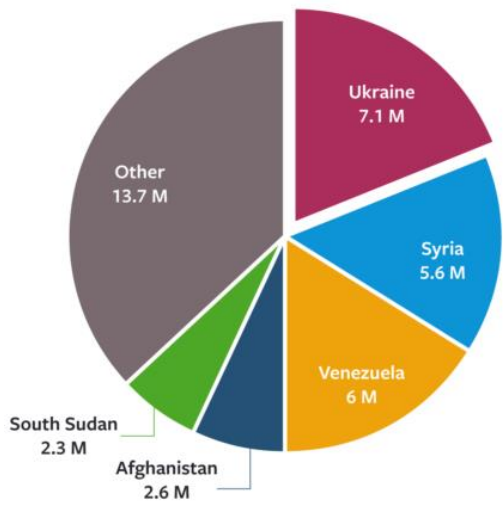


Fig.2.1 Global refugees in 2022

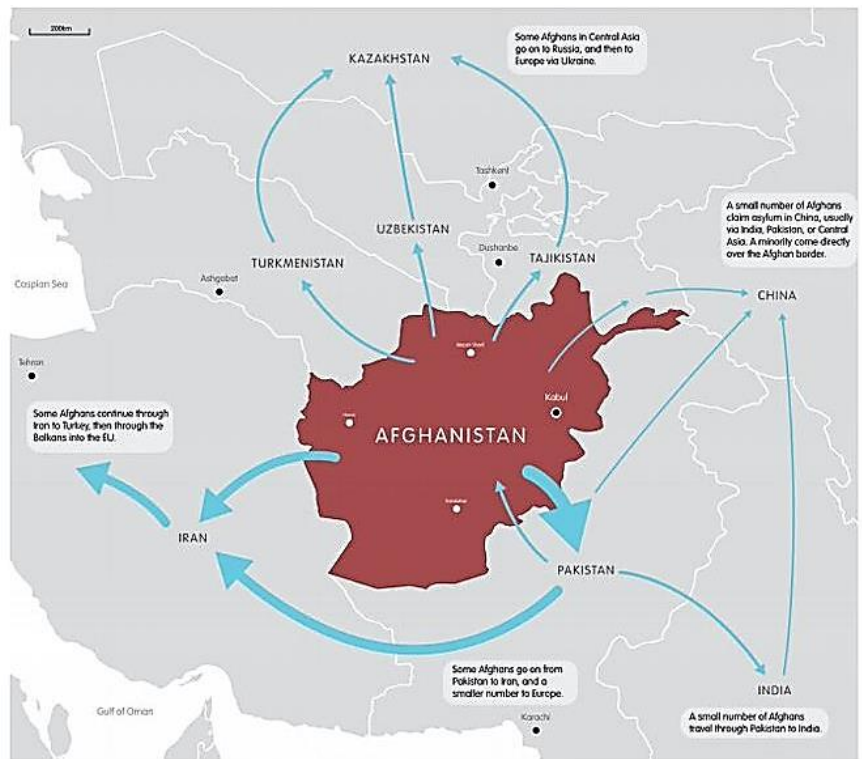


Fig.2.2 Migration routes from Afghanistan



Fig.2.3 Migration routes from India

Refugees in Delhi :

Delhi has attracted migrants and refugees for centuries. Rural Indian migrants have come, as have economic migrants representing international trade and commerce. When India was partitioned in 1947, the majority of citizen-refugees from the Pakistani region settled in Delhi. Over time, new groups of arrivals clustered in different locations, and in post-independence India, very few residents can claim that

their families have lived in Delhi more than three generations back. There are many internally displaced people, and or refugees too. Eight thousand Tibetans have lived in Delhi since being granted asylum by the Government of India in the 1960s (UNHCR, 2016. See also Sharma, 2017). By 2017, Delhi became home to about 15,000 refugees and 5,000 asylum seekers—mostly Somalis, Syrians, Afghans, Burmese—registered with UNHCR in India. Non-Tibetan refugees are required to register with UNHCR whose India office is located in New Delhi, so it is convenient for refugees to stay in the city.

Refugees tend to live where they have pre-existing networks of relatives or friends, which results in somewhat geographically segregated refugee communities. Thus, the first wave of Afghan refugees, who came to Delhi in the 1980s, mostly settled in Lajpat Nagar. The second wave of Afghans, who came after 2010, settled in Bhogal (which is close to Lajpat Nagar), but also in a new location, Khirki Village in Malviya Nagar. Perhaps this shift occurred because refugee assistance centers sprung up in Malviya Nagar, in response to the high concentration of other refugee nationalities living in Khirki Village, who settled there because of their pre-existing social networks. Most Indians stereotype “Africans” as one group, and thus refugees from various African countries—Somalis, Nigerians, Kenyans, etc.—all tend to live in Khirki, as protection against a common “othering.”

The refugee population is often joined by immigrants from their home countries. Thus, Afghans who come to Delhi for medical treatment live in Lajpat Nagar, either with friends or family, or in rented accommodations, bed and breakfast arrangements, or cheap hotels. Similarly, Nigerian students live in Khirki Village, where they can access networks of earlier Nigerian migrants.

Generally, there are fewer daily acts of racism in this migrant-dense neighborhood than in majority-Indian neighborhoods, but sporadically— sometimes once in two years, other times multiple times per year—the neighborhood is attacked by xenophobic mobs, intolerant of those they consider “outsiders.” The most shocking example was in January 2014 when former law minister of Delhi, Somnath Bharti, led a mob at midnight to attack the Africans living there (Ugandan and Nigerian, but all the same to the mob), accusing them of peddling drugs and prostitution.

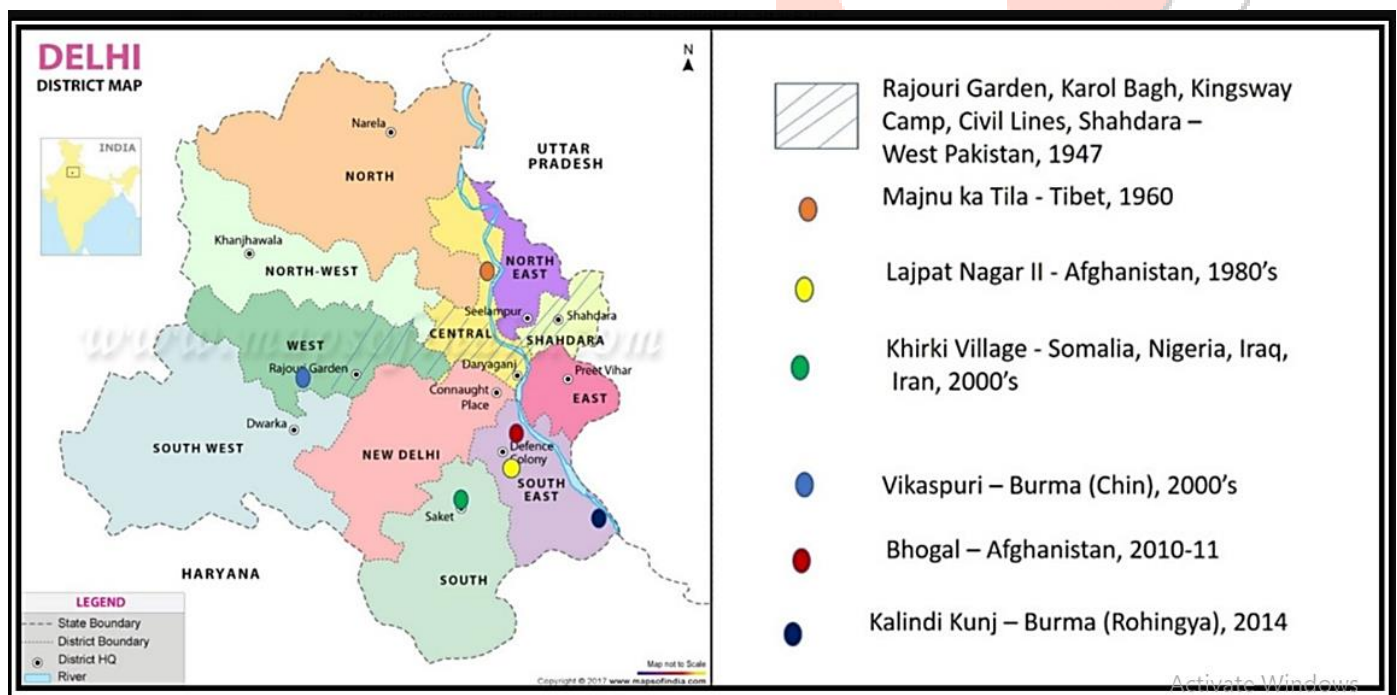


Fig.2.4 Location of Refugees in Delhi

Refugees from the same community live in the same neighborhood, and this map is a representation of such neighborhoods. However, it is possible that some families move to other locations in search of better work opportunities or better housing facilities.

The various challenges faced by Afghan refugees in India are as follows:

Education:

Access to education is a fundamental right, but Afghan refugees in India face significant barriers in accessing education. According to a report by the UNHCR, only around 25% of Afghan refugee children in India attend school. This is due to a range of factors, including lack of documentation, language barriers, and financial constraints. Many Afghan refugees do not have valid identity documents, which makes it difficult for them to enroll in school or access other services. Additionally, many Afghan refugees do not speak the local language, which creates a language barrier that makes it difficult for them to communicate with teachers and classmates.

Another major challenge faced by Afghan refugees in accessing education is financial constraints. Many Afghan refugee families live in poverty and cannot afford to send their children to school. Even when education is free, families may need to pay for uniforms, textbooks, and other school supplies, which can be unaffordable for some.

Employment :

Access to employment is crucial for refugees to become self-sufficient and integrate into their host communities. However, Afghan refugees in India face significant barriers to employment, including legal restrictions, discrimination, and lack of skills and qualifications. According to the UNHCR, only around 20% of Afghan refugees in India are employed, and many are working in low-paying and insecure jobs.

One of the main challenges faced by Afghan refugees in accessing employment is legal restrictions. Afghan refugees in India are not allowed to work in the formal sector, which limits their employment opportunities. As a result, many Afghan refugees are forced to work in the informal sector, where they are often paid low wages and do not have access to social protection.

Discrimination :

This is another significant challenge faced by Afghan refugees in accessing employment. Many employers may be hesitant to hire Afghan refugees due to their refugee status or perceived lack of skills and qualifications. This can lead to further marginalization and exclusion from the labor market.

Health :

Access to healthcare is essential for refugees to maintain their health and wellbeing. However, Afghan refugees in India face significant barriers to accessing healthcare, including language barriers, lack of documentation, and financial constraints. According to the UNHCR, around 50% of Afghan refugees in India do not have access to healthcare.

Afghan refugees in India face significant socio-economic challenges, such as limited access to education, employment, and healthcare. These challenges are primarily due to legal restrictions, discrimination, financial constraints, and language barriers. To address these challenges, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach that takes into account the specific needs of Afghan refugees in India.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The research employs a qualitative methodology to collect and analyze data from Afghan refugees living in India, civil society organizations, and government officials. The study uses a purposive sampling technique to select participants. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions are conducted with participants to collect data. The data collected are analyzed using thematic analysis.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results of Descriptive Statics of Study Variables

Table 4.1: Main Reasons for migration from Afghanistan to India

S.No	Reasons of migration	Percentage %
1	Violence & Insecurity	35.2
2	Personal/Family	24.5
3	Economic	14.9
4	Lack of social services	11.4
5	Lack of rights	6.1
6	Refused	3.5
7	Environmental/natural calamity	0.9
8	Everyone around me was migrating	3.5

S.No	Status of Afghan refugee	Before the war (Pre 2001) %	After the war (2022) %
1	Afghans facing food insecurity	62	92
2	Children under five facing acute malnutrition	9	50
3	Afghans living in poverty	80	97
4	Women's rights	Heavily restricted	Heavily restricted

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS:

The study's findings highlight the significant challenges faced by Afghan refugees in India. The study finds that Afghan refugees in India do not have legal status and live without any official documentation. They face significant barriers in finding legal and secure employment due to their lack of documentation and language barriers. Afghan refugees in India often live in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions and do not have access to basic amenities such as clean water, sanitation, and healthcare. Many Afghan refugee children in India do not have access to education due to financial constraints or lack of opportunities. Afghan refugees in India often face difficulties accessing healthcare due to their lack of legal status and financial constraints. They also face discrimination and harassment due to their ethnicity, religion, and language.

V. RECOMMENDATION & CONCLUSION :

Education

To improve access to education for Afghan refugees in India, the government should provide more support to schools in areas with high refugee populations, including language training for teachers and students. Additionally, schools should be required to accept refugee children without identity documents and waive any fees for schooling, uniforms, and textbooks.

Employment

To improve access to employment, the government should consider allowing Afghan refugees to work in the formal sector, which would provide more opportunities for them to access decent work and social protection. Additionally, employers should be encouraged to hire Afghan refugees by offering incentives and support, such as tax breaks and training programs.

Health

To improve access to healthcare, the government should provide free or low-cost healthcare services to Afghan refugees in India. Additionally, hospitals and clinics should be equipped with language interpretation services to ensure that Afghan refugees can communicate effectively with healthcare professionals.

Legal Status

To address the issue of lack of documentation, the Indian government should consider granting legal status to Afghan refugees in India. This would enable them to access education, employment, and healthcare services more easily, and would also provide them with legal protection against discrimination and exploitation.

Advocacy and Awareness

Advocacy and awareness-raising efforts should be undertaken to raise awareness about the challenges faced by Afghan refugees in India and to advocate for their rights. This could include awareness campaigns in local communities, media outreach, and engagement with civil society organizations and human rights groups.

The Human Development Report by United Nation Development Programme (2009) highlights that migration is integral to the process of human development and it plays a very important role in achieving sustainable development goals, thereby preventing migration could even be counterproductive.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has highlighted that the policies and programs facilitating the integration of migrants at the destination remain weak at best or non-existent and suggested the inclusion and integration of migrants in development.

Hence India needs to formulate migration centric policies, strategies, and institutional mechanisms in order to ensure inclusive growth and development and reduce distress induced migration, thereby increasing India's prospects for poverty reduction and achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

The government at Centre needs to provide amenities and social securities for the migrant population which is riddled with the issues of inadequate housing; low-paid, insecure or hazardous work; extreme vulnerability of women and children to trafficking and sex exploitation etc.

In conclusion, improving the socio-economic outcomes of Afghan refugees in India requires a multi-pronged approach that addresses the specific challenges faced by this population. By adopting the recommendations outlined above, policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders can work together to improve the lives of Afghan refugees in India and enable them to become self-sufficient and integrated members of their host communities.

REFERENCES

- [1]<https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts>
- [2]https://www.google.com/search?q=shelter+given+to+refugee&source=lmns&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiu_ZSpie_8AhUFn3IEHWroAn8Q_AUoAHoECAEQAA
- [3] <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>

