



**HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION OF
Afghan Migrants
FOLLOWING THEIR FORCED DEPORTATION
BY THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT**



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AWA Legal and Social Advisory Hub

The AWA Legal and Social Advisory Hub is an independent organization based in the Netherlands, led by a group of Afghan female lawyers and human rights activists.

AWA was established with the aim of supporting migrants, asylum seekers, and vulnerable individuals—especially Afghan women and children. The center strives to uphold and strengthen human dignity and fundamental rights through legal services, social counseling, research, and education.

With over 15 years of experience in law, advocacy, and social support in Afghanistan, AWA now serves as an official platform to expand its specialized services for the Afghan people, particularly women.

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Introduction	1
Research Questions	2
Research Objectives	2
Importance and Necessity of the Research	2
Research Methodology and Data Collection	3
Limitations in Access to Information	3
Background of the Issue	4
Field Findings of AWA Legal and Social Counseling Hub on the Situation of Migrants at Islam Qala and Zaranj Borders	5
Expert Analysis on the Deportation of Afghan Migrants from Iran	7
Domestic Iranian Law vs. International Law on Migration and Asylum	7
International Law on Refugees and Migration	8
Treatment of Legal and Illegal Migrants by the Iranian Government.....	9
Humanitarian, Economic, and Security Impacts of Forced Deportation on Afghan Migrants	9
Infrastructure Challenges for Receiving Returnees in Afghanistan	10
Political and Security Factors in Iran-Taliban Relations and Their Impact on Deportations	11
Conditions of Children, Women, and Vulnerable Groups During Forced Deportation.....	11
Rights of Children: Education, Health, and Safety After Return	12
Role of Civil Society and Public Response in Iran and Afghanistan	12
Conclusion	13
Recommendations	14
Reference	16

Introduction

In recent decades, Iran has been one of the primary destinations for Afghan citizens seeking refuge. The number of Afghan migrants has significantly increased, especially in the past four years following the Taliban's return to power. Due to security, political, and economic crises, many Afghans have been forced to leave their country and settle in Iran. With rising economic, social, and political pressures—and a growing wave of anti-migrant sentiment in Iran, particularly after the 12-day conflict between Iran and Israel—the forced deportation of Afghan migrants has intensified, raising concerns about human rights violations.

This process, often carried out collectively and without legal procedures or adherence to fundamental human rights principles, has sparked widespread national and international concern. Vulnerable groups such as children, women, the sick, and long-term residents in Iran are especially at risk.

According to recent statistics published by various international organizations, Iranian government officials and Afghanistan's Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation report that over one million people have returned to Afghanistan from Iran in just a few months since the beginning of March 2025.

In response to these deportations, AWA provided free legal consultations and assistance in preparing legal documents and requests for dozens of cases over a 10-day period.

Ultimately, the center decided to launch a research project to examine the human rights situation of these migrants.

This research, aimed at analyzing the legal, humanitarian, and political dimensions of Afghan deportations from Iran, was conducted by AWA Legal and Social Advisory Hub. The study analyzes domestic and international documents and evaluates the individual and social consequences of this process on the lives of deported Afghan citizens. It concludes with recommendations to safeguard migrant rights, ensure Iran's compliance with international obligations, and strengthen protective mechanisms.

Research Questions

1. How is the deportation process of Afghan migrants from Iran carried out?
2. Are human rights principles and standards observed during this process?
3. What are the economic, security, and psychological impacts of deportation on migrants?

Research Objectives

Main Objective:

- To examine and analyze the human rights situation in the deportation process of Afghan migrants from Iran.

Secondary Objectives:

- Identify violations of human rights standards during deportation.
- Investigate the experiences of Afghan migrants during detention, deportation, and afterward.
- Analyze the role of international law in protecting migrants and asylum seekers.

Importance and Necessity of the Research

Given the increasing reports of mass and immediate deportations of Afghan migrants—often conducted without regard for human rights standards—this legal and humanitarian investigation is essential. It aims to identify systematic human rights violations and draw the attention of responsible organizations to address and prevent further abuses. This research not only raises public awareness but also serves as a resource for responsible institutions, human rights organizations, and international bodies.

Research Methodology and Data Collection

This study employs a qualitative approach, focusing on in-depth analysis and contextual understanding of the legal and humanitarian aspects of Afghan deportations from Iran.

Data collection methods include:

- Interviews with human rights experts, university professors, psychologists, and migration specialists
- Field interviews with Afghan migrants deported after the 12-day Iran-Israel conflict
- Field reports and credible news sources to obtain factual information on the deportation process and institutional responses
- Analysis of international human rights documents, including conventions, resolutions, and other legal materials relevant to the research topic

Limitations in Access to Information

AWA Legal and Social Advisory Hub Despite of extensive efforts to gather comprehensive and reliable data, this research faced limitations in accessing official and transparent information. The lack of transparency from institutions affiliated with the de facto government, the absence of trustworthy data, and logistical and security challenges in target areas made primary data collection difficult.

To maintain continuity and real-time access to information, the AWA Legal and Social Advisory Hub developed and implemented online interview forms. These forms were designed to enable fast, secure, and structured data collection.

A significant portion of these forms was completed by field collaborators at the Islam Qala and Zaranj border points, as well as by Afghan migrant citizens who had returned to Kabul. These data reflect the perspectives and experiences of migrants in the mentioned regions and play a crucial role in analyzing the human rights situation.

Background of the Issue

Following the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021, a new wave of Afghan migration to neighboring countries—particularly Iran—began. Iran once again witnessed the mass arrival of Afghan citizens, including various ethnic and religious groups, human rights activists, military personnel, former government employees, and civilians fleeing insecurity, poverty, and Taliban repression.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by the end of 2023, the Afghan migrant population in Iran was estimated to be between 4.5 to 6 million people. This population included legal migrants, holders of Amayesh cards, and undocumented migrants.

In June 2025, following the end of the 12-day war between Iran and Israel, the Iranian government significantly intensified its immigration policies against Afghan migrants. Some Iranian officials accused Afghan migrants of “spying for Israel” and, citing security concerns, set a deadline for the departure of undocumented individuals.

According to an official announcement by Iran's Ministry of Interior, the final date for the departure of undocumented migrants was set for 15 Saratan 1404 (July 5, 2025).

In late June 2025, a large-scale operation to detain and deport Afghans began. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), over 233,900 individuals were returned from Iran to Afghanistan in June alone, most of whom were forcibly deported.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), by July 19, 2025, the number of Afghan migrants returned from Iran to Afghanistan had exceeded 1,190,000. This figure includes both voluntary and forced returns, with the majority occurring after the Iran-Israel war and the implementation of Iran's strict immigration policies.

Reports from various news outlets indicate that the average daily return of deported Afghan citizens from Iran reached 9,000 people, and in some weeks, the number rose to as high as 88,000.

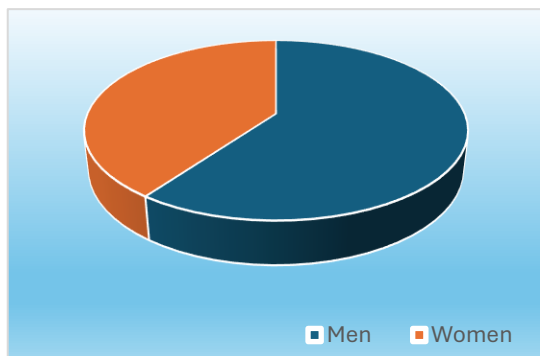
These statistics show that the wave of deportations is not only extensive but

unprecedented, and has led to a humanitarian crisis at Afghanistan's borders. Many migrants, in extreme heat and without shelter or basic services, were stranded at border crossings such as Islam Qala.

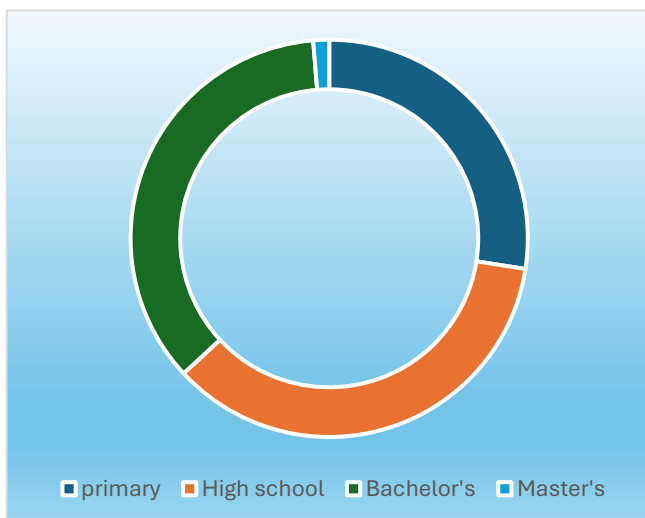
Field Findings of AWA Legal and Social Counseling Hub on the Situation of Migrants at Islam Qala and Zaranj Borders

Following field research conducted in the border areas of Islam Qala, Zarange, and Kabul the AWA Legal and Social Advisory Hub obtained the following data, which includes objective assessments of the conditions faced by returning migrants and the challenges they encounter.

These data were collected by our collaborators through online research forms or direct interviews with deported migrants from Iran.

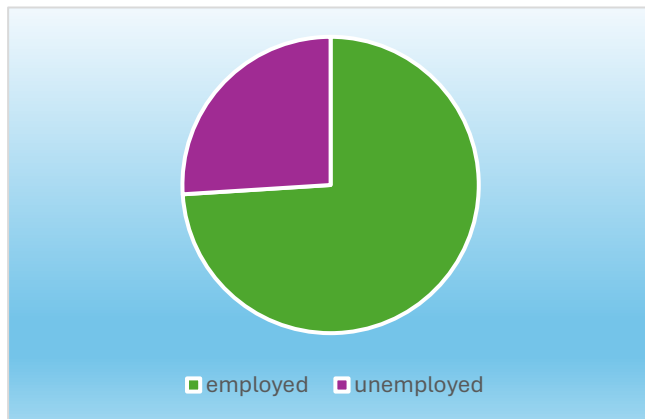


Among the participants in AWA's sample population, approximately 60% were men and 40% women. Of these, 68% were married and 32% single.



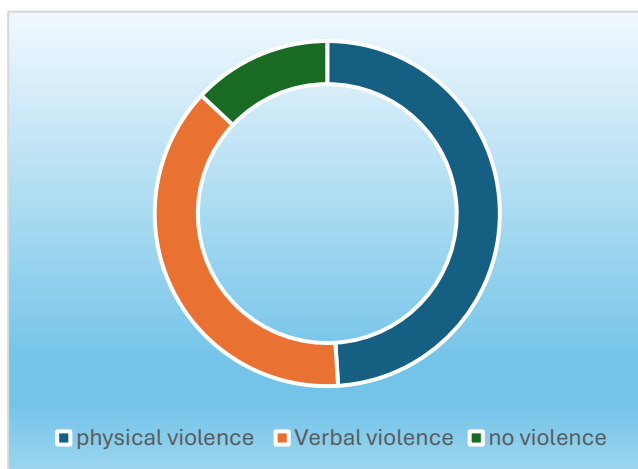
Educational levels ranged from primary education to Master's degrees.

- Most participants had resided in Iran for 4 to 14 years. About 50% had legal residency documents such as Amayesh cards, valid passports with tourist, student, or work visas, and census registration papers.
- Participants cited poverty, insecurity, and lack of educational opportunities for women as the main reasons for migration. 20% suffered from physical illnesses or chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and required dialysis.



Approximately 74% of participants had been employed in Iran, typically in labor-intensive jobs such as construction, sales, tailoring, gardening, and carpet repair.

- Around 55% had rented homes or property in Iran. Of these, 41% were unable to recover their rental deposits before deportation and lacked legal documentation to support their claims or file complaints.



87% of participants reported experiencing violence during deportation or route. Of these, 49% experienced physical violence and 38% verbal abuse.

- Participants came from various provinces of Afghanistan and most lacked personal shelter, forcing them to rent homes upon return.
- About 99% expressed fear and uncertainty about their future in Afghanistan.

Expert Analysis on the Deportation of Afghan Migrants from Iran

In another section of this research, AWA engaged a wide range of experts—including university professors, legal scholars, civil society activists, journalists, and psychologists—with targeted questions. Their responses provided insights into the legal, humanitarian, political, and security dimensions of the deportation of Afghan migrants from Iran.

This analysis focuses on the implications of the deportation process within the framework of national and international law, the status of returning migrants, the role of governments, and the impact on vulnerable groups such as children, women, and former Afghan military personnel.

Domestic Iranian Law vs. International Law on Migration and Asylum

Experts believe that Iran, while relying on its domestic laws, has violated international legal frameworks in the deportation of Afghan migrants.

Iranian domestic law considers illegal immigration a criminal offense and permits the deportation of undocumented migrants. For example, the “Law on Entry and Residence of Foreign Nationals” enacted in 1310 allows the Iranian government to deport foreign nationals in cases of unauthorized residence or threats to public order. Article 11 of the same law states that foreigners without permits may be expelled. Executive regulations also grant the Ministry of Interior the authority to identify and deport undocumented individuals.

Although Iran has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, it has acceded to its 1967 Protocol. This obligates Iran to uphold the provisions of the Protocol, which prohibits the

forced return of refugees.

Moreover, Iran has accepted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which in Article 14 states that “everyone has the right to seek asylum from persecution.” Therefore, deporting individuals who face torture or persecution violates this declaration.

[International Law on Refugees and Migration](#)

According to university professors and human rights activists, Iran’s forced deportation of Afghan migrants contradicts several international legal instruments, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Iran’s actions—mass deportations without due process—violate the principles outlined in multiple international human rights and refugee protection documents.

- Article 33 of the 1951 Refugee Convention prohibits returning refugees to territories where their life, freedom, or security would be at risk. This principle is considered customary international law and is binding even on states that are not parties to the Convention.
- Article 3 of the Convention Against Torture prohibits states from deporting or extraditing individuals to countries where there are substantial grounds to believe they would be at risk of torture.
- Article 13 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights forbids collective expulsion without individual case review. It guarantees the right to a fair hearing before deportation and the opportunity to challenge the decision before a competent authority.

Reports and observations from the deportation process of Afghan migrants from Iran show that these legal standards were ignored. Individual cases were not reviewed prior to deportation.

Furthermore, the current situation in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan—marked by torture, arbitrary detention, forced disappearances, killings, and widespread human rights

violations—was not considered. Women, in particular, are deprived of all fundamental rights, including education and employment.

Treatment of Legal and Illegal Migrants by the Iranian Government

Experts and journalists were asked whether the Iranian government treats migrants with legal documents (passport, Amayesh card, visa) differently from undocumented migrants. They believe that, in principle, the Iranian government should treat these groups differently, but in practice, there has been no distinction.

Although it is claimed that holders of official documents such as passports, visas, or Amayesh cards enjoy relative security, field evidence contradicts this. In the recent wave of deportations, even migrants with legal residency, valid Amayesh cards, or official visas issued by Iranian consulates were detained and deported.

There have been multiple reports of legal passports being torn, students with Amayesh cards being expelled from schools, and nighttime arrests of individuals with legal residency.

This situation shows that even possessing legal documents does not guarantee the protection of migrant rights in the face of Iran's security-driven policies, administrative corruption, and lack of transparency.

Humanitarian, Economic, and Security Impacts of Forced Deportation on Afghan Migrants

Political and economic experts believe that the sudden and large-scale deportation of Afghan migrants from Iran has widespread consequences across all sectors:

- **Food Crisis:** There are no facilities or preparations for food distribution at border points. Many returnees are unemployed. According to UNHCR, 60% of deportees have no source of income and lack basic necessities in Afghanistan.
- **Pressure on Border Provinces:** The concentration of returnees in provinces like Herat and Nimroz has placed immense strain on limited local resources.

- **Loss of Remittances:** The reduction in remittances from Afghan workers in Iran has cut off income for thousands of families, exacerbating poverty.
- **Housing Crisis:** Even in remote villages, housing is scarce and expensive.
- **Security Risks:** Former military personnel, women activists, and journalists face threats of arrest or abuse by the Taliban.

Infrastructure Challenges for Receiving Returnees in Afghanistan

Experts agree that there is a complete lack of infrastructure.

Essential systems for shelter, healthcare, education, and employment are not in place. The Taliban government, due to weak governance, limited resources, and discriminatory policies, lacks the capacity and will to manage this humanitarian crisis.

Reports from IOM and UN agencies highlight the absence of adequate temporary housing, humanitarian aid, psychological support, and health services in border areas.

In many cases, returnees were left homeless and without resources. Without grassroots aid efforts at the borders, a major humanitarian disaster would have occurred.

Due to the inability of Afghan domestic institutions and international organizations to respond effectively to the crisis of returning migrants, a wave of grassroots support emerged from citizens in various provinces, especially Herat. These spontaneous efforts were most visible at the Islam Qala border and included a wide range of humanitarian services.

Citizen-led initiatives included:

- Distribution of food and essential medicines
- Provision of health services and basic medical aid
- Transportation of migrants to various provinces for temporary shelter
- Establishment of emergency shelters in border areas
- Psychological counseling and legal support, especially for vulnerable individuals

Political and Security Factors in Iran-Taliban Relations and Their Impact on Deportations

One major reason Iran accused Afghan migrants of espionage after the 12-day war with Israel was its concern over future conflict.

Iran fears that among the Afghan migrants are former military personnel trained by U.S. forces who could potentially be used against Iran.

Other contributing factors include:

- Gradual normalization of Tehran-Taliban relations: Iran seeks to maintain its economic and political influence in Afghanistan. Migrants have sometimes been used as leverage in negotiations.
- Dispute over Helmand River water rights: Iran has repeatedly used the migrant issue to pressure the Taliban over water-sharing agreements, making migrants pawns in political bargaining.

Conditions of Children, Women, and Vulnerable Groups During Forced Deportation

According to humanitarian law, women and children are always considered vulnerable groups. A significant percentage of migrants are children.

UNICEF reported that over 5,000 unaccompanied children were deported in June alone. Under Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, separating children from their parents is prohibited unless deemed necessary by competent authorities.

However, in the deportation of Afghan children from Iran, this principle was violated, with widespread separation occurring without justified reasons.

Women and girls, especially those who are single or without guardians, face severe travel restrictions and lack access to aid and services upon return.

Other vulnerable groups—such as human rights activists, journalists, and former security personnel—are also among the deportees and face serious threats.

Rights of Children: Education, Health, and Safety After Return

Children returning from Iran are often deprived of education, especially girls, who under Taliban policy are banned from studying beyond sixth grade.

This is a clear violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and jeopardizes the future of thousands.

In terms of health, the lack of medical centers and vaccination programs in border areas has led to physical and psychological crises for children.

In terms of safety, children born or raised in Iran face unfamiliar environments, language and cultural barriers, and real risks such as recruitment, exploitation, or forced marriage.

Role of Civil Society and Public Response in Iran and Afghanistan

Civil society in Afghanistan has played a broad and active role both online and in humanitarian aid.

In Iran, a small number of civil activists, writers, independent journalists, and professional associations have voiced limited protests against the harsh and illegal deportations.

However, censorship, a securitized environment, and racist propaganda against Afghan migrants have severely restricted widespread protest.

International organizations such as UNHCR and IOM have issued warnings, but so far, no effective, systematic, or coordinated international action has been taken to stop this process.

Conclusion

The overall findings of this research indicate that the deportation of Afghan migrants from Iran lacks a clear legal basis and does not align with international standards. In practice, it has led to widespread human rights violations, disregard for the needs of vulnerable individuals, and increased instability in the region.

The Iranian government has used the issue of migration as a political tool in its domestic and regional policies, ignoring the principles of non-refoulement, the prohibition of arbitrary deportation, and the right to fair legal proceedings.

Meanwhile, the Taliban government, due to structural weaknesses and lack of capacity, is unable to meet even the basic humanitarian needs of returnees.

The result of this cycle is a deep humanitarian crisis in border areas, threats to the livelihoods of thousands of families, the spread of social harm, and the weakening of prospects for stability in Afghanistan.

Under these circumstances, responsible intervention by international institutions, adherence to legal obligations by governments, and the strengthening of humanitarian approaches to migration management are more necessary than ever.

Recommendations

Below is a set of legal and international recommendations aimed at improving the situation of Afghan migrants in Iran and managing the crisis of forced deportations. These proposals are based on principles of international law, human rights documents, and global best practices:

1. Commitment to the Principle of Non-Refoulement

Iran must explicitly commit to refraining from deporting individuals who face serious threats to their life, freedom, or dignity upon return.

Even though Iran is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, this principle is part of customary international law and binding on all states.

2. Differentiation Between Migrants, Asylum Seekers, and Refugees

Iran should establish a transparent and legal mechanism to assess individuals' status based on their need for international protection or specific humanitarian conditions (e.g., children, patients, pregnant women, special cases, and the elderly).

Using individual assessments instead of mass deportations is required under Article 13 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

3. Prohibition of Arbitrary Deportations Without Fair Legal Process

Any deportation decision must include access to legal counsel, interpreters, independent judicial bodies, and the opportunity to present a defense.

Detention of migrants should only occur when necessary, proportionate, and under judicial oversight. Arbitrary detention is prohibited under Article 9 of the ICCPR.

4. Establishment of a National Committee for the Protection of Refugees and Migrants

An independent body (including representatives from the government, civil society, and international organizations) should be formed to monitor deportation processes, address migrant complaints, and recommend legal reforms.

5. Active and Transparent Engagement with International Organizations

Iran should strengthen its cooperation with organizations such as UNHCR, IOM, and the UN Human Rights Office, allowing their presence and oversight in deportation procedures, camps, and border areas.

It is recommended that Iran formally request technical, financial, and expert assistance from these bodies to ensure fair and humane management of migrant issues.

6. Launch of Regional and International Monitoring Mechanisms

Creating a “Joint Regional Task Force” involving Iran, Afghanistan, UN agencies, and countries hosting Afghan migrants could facilitate information exchange, policy coordination, and prevention of similar crises in the future.

Reference

Statistical and Official Reference

<https://afghanistan.iom.int/news/record-256000-afghan-migrants-return-iran-iom-warns-dire-funding-shortfall>

<https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-returnees-overview-19-july-2025>

Legal Documents

https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=2dcb3ec73b8f4595&sxsrf=AE3TifOjZf4UicsBGclm_EKSyxK3dE8Yug:1754038896929&q=%DA%A9%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%88%D9%86+%DB%B1%DB%B9%DB%B5%DB%B1+%D9%BE%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%86+%22%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%86%DA%A9%22&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiLqP6KoOmOAxVTiP0HHd7pJcYQ5t4CegQIGRAB

https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=2dcb3ec73b8f4595&sxsrf=AE3TifNL4A3RgRtAOPJS1jkSQVUhdL_NAw:1754038995733&q=%22%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%86%DA%A9%22+%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C%D9%87+%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C+%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%88%D9%82+%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%B1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwis_ly6oOmOAxU3yLsIHfLLCkcQ5t4CegQIGBAB

Research Question Link

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