

Afghan Immigrant Crisis

The chain of events in Afghanistan has produced unimaginable disasters in the country. The war that the US had triggered seems to have come to an end, but Afghanistan keeps falling deeper into trouble, causing Afghans to be the most vulnerable people on the planet. People's incomes are plummeting; while basic needs of healthcare, food, and electricity are almost absent. Prices of food have also risen. Food insecurity is badly affecting millions of Afghan people. To make matters worse, in the middle of it all, the US has frozen the country's assets, when in fact, the US and its European allies are profoundly responsible to assist the Afghans who are in dire need of help.

Afghan Immigration in recent years

Angeliki Dimitriadi's *'Irregular Afghan Migration to Europe'* book explains that changes in national legislations by EU states - as a response to immigrant arrival - badly influenced the rightful claims to asylum, particularly those coming from Afghanistan. The EU not only created hurdles to human mobility from Afghanistan to Europe but also pressured the Refugees and Repatriations Ministry of Afghanistan to advise Afghans from undertaking the journey to the continent. In exchange, the Union promised aid and assistance to limited Afghan migrants. The irony is that EU states are not willing to accept Afghan immigrants as genuine refugees, rather they are considered as economic migrants, seeking the pursuit of a better life within European borders. [\[i\]](#)

Impact of the Syrian crisis on Afghan Immigrants

The crisis in Syria pushed millions of its people toward the European borders. In 2015, the UN announced that out of the total 22 million Syrian population, seven million were displaced from the country, making them the largest group of refugees under UNHCR's mandate *en route* Europe. In the same year, UNHCR estimated that 60% of the total migrants to Europe were from Syria, 20% from Afghanistan, and 20% from other nationalities.

The arrival of Syrian refugees changed the immigration routes. It also drastically altered the policies of reception and asylum in the EU. The EU's inefficient response mechanisms to the refugee crisis badly impacted the asylum seekers there. This can be seen when a large number of Afghan migrants also arrived at European borders at the time of the Syrian exodus in 2015.

The focus of the whole world on the Syrian refugee crisis directly affected the Afghan migration to and from Greece. The opening of the Western Balkan route in 2015, the reversal in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRoM'S) policy of the removal of Afghans eligibility for passage, and the infamous EU-Turkey deal affected Afghan immigrants and asylum seekers who were no longer treated as refugees. These policies later resulted in the reduction in the flow of Afghan refugees. The Paris attack on 13 November 2015 also transformed the refugee issue into a security crisis overnight. This attack reinforced the view of stronger border controls across the EU, which unfortunately resulted in the distinction between refugees in Greece with Syrians being prioritized over other nationalities, particularly the Afghans. They have been repeatedly highlighting the preferential treatment of the Syrians over them. This prioritization created tensions between Afghans and Syrians with increased insecurity among Afghans. Besides, the delayed registration of Afghan immigrants made it unable for them to leave Greece for longer periods of time. [\[ii\]](#)

The division of refugees based on their nationality and steps taken against their right to mobility, and then unilateral decisions by member states, starting from Austria's arbitrary decision in Feb 2016 to impose a daily limit on entries/day and asylum applications/day, and then followed by FYRoM's announcement that Afghans would no longer be allowed to cross from Greece made things even worse for Afghan refugees and asylum seekers.

EU-Turkey Deal

The opening and closing of the border placed Afghans in a state of involuntary immobility in Greece, and

the EU-Turkey Deal raised the prospect of their involuntary return. The EU-Turkey Deal had serious repercussions for asylum seekers seeking nationalities both in Greece and Turkey. NGOs including Amnesty International claimed that there were forcible returns of at-risk Afghans under this deal. [iii]

In March 2016, Statewatch leaked a Commission document outlining a plan to return 80,000 Afghan asylum seekers to Afghanistan, making it harder for these people to be seen as genuine refugees. Meanwhile, Finland declared Afghanistan as a safer country, Germany also considered the concept of safer areas to justify the return of Afghans, and the UK also decided that deportations to Afghanistan will resume. This new concept of safer areas and regions in Afghanistan gradually got a central place in the European approach to migration. [iv]

This crisis has brought into focus the horror that immigrants and asylum seekers, especially those from Afghanistan, are facing. The migration of Afghans to Europe through Greece highlights its intricacy. Afghan immigrants are a special case because they escape the traditional categorization of migrants or refugees. Afghans blend both categories and at the same time show the complexities of human mobility, which need to be factored in both internal and external dimensions of migration. The othering of Afghan refugees by labeling them bogus asylum seekers or economic migrants shows that the concept of a refugee has been narrowly interpreted despite the evolution and complexity of human mobility.

What is happening especially with the Afghan people implores the European world to build a better international system for human mobility across its borders. Europe and the US must support Afghans' immigration given the danger they face in their own country. They must provide the resources to the Afghan government to prevent worse civil conflicts in the country and a safe way for the asylum seekers to seek refuge. The US and Europe need to review their policy of apathy and hostility towards Afghan immigrants and asylum seekers in particular and others in general.

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[i] <https://www.thelocal.de/20160202/aid-will-stop-if-refugees-keep-coming-germany-tells-kabul/>

[ii] A. Dimitriadi, Irregular Afghan Migration to Europe, Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship.

[iii] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2016/03/turkey-safe-country-sham-revealed-dozens-of-afghans-returned/>

[iv] A. Dimitriadi, Irregular Afghan Migration to Europe, Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship.

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