

A New Approach to Afghanistan's Refugee Crisis

For nearly 40 years, people in Afghanistan have been fleeing their homes. Since the 1970s Afghanistan has been the center of many conflicts between different factions. This has resulted in waves of Afghans leaving the country, mostly to Pakistan and Iran, with more than 3 million having fled by 1980 (A Historical Timeline of Afghanistan). The most impactful of these groups include the former Afghan governments, the Soviet Union, the United States, the Mujahadeen, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda. The original conflict spread from a revolt against their first president, and continued through multiple other rulers, causing the formation of the rebel group Mujahadeen, who fought against the Soviet-backed government with the support of the U.S. Eventually both the Soviet Union and the United States backed out of the conflict, which led to a divided Mujahadeen taking over the country.

A sect of the Mujahadeen called the Taliban formed, and soon took over the country. The Taliban became known for their strict interpretation of Islamic law, requiring women to wear burkas in public; preventing girls over 10 from going to school; and banning most music, television, and cinema; as well as their harsh treatment of anybody who dared to speak against them (Who are the Taliban?). The 9/11 attacks of al-Qaeda brought America's interest back to Afghanistan, as the Taliban leadership harbored the people responsible for the attacks. The Taliban's refusal to give up 9/11 mastermind Osama bin Laden and his followers led to a war lasting nearly 20 years, which caused the deaths of many thousands of people, and the displacement of millions more.

As the U.S. withdrew the remainder of its troops in 2021 the Taliban quickly regained control over the majority of the country (A Look at Afghanistan's 40 Years of War), filling the power

vacuum left by the U.S. This sudden takeover caused many women, children, and citizens aligned with the U.S. to flee their homes again.

The first of many impacts is the number of Afghans who have been displaced within the country. At the end of 2021, there were more than 3 million Afghans internally displaced (Timeline of Afghan Displacements). Second is the number of people fleeing the country, totaling over 2.5 million people, with more than 85% living in Pakistan and Iran (Afghanistan Refugee Crisis Explained). Of those newly displaced people, 80% are women and children (Afghanistan Refugees 2021).

Even after they escape the country, Afghan refugees face many struggles, often living in crowded camps, with limited access to many essentials including shelter, food, water, healthcare, jobs, and education. Whether they are relocated into camps or urban areas, refugees face a large amount of discrimination almost everywhere they go.

In 2021, Iran began deporting many Afghan refugees back into Afghanistan, saying it does not have the capacity for all the refugees it is currently housing. Those who are able to stay in Iran are often faced with poverty and unfavorable job opportunities. They are often accepted as seasonal workers and paid significantly less than Iranians working the same jobs (Aman). In Pakistan conditions for refugees are not much better. While more of them live in urban areas, they are still faced with severe discrimination and poverty.

To break this cycle of persecution and poverty, an international plan is needed to funnel refugees to other willing countries. If the Afghan refugee population were more divided between countries, there would be more jobs available for refugees, and countries wouldn't have as much difficulty supporting them. With the current refugee system, too much strain is put on countries

neighboring the crisis, while even those who may hold part of the blame for the crisis are not held responsible.

I suggest a three-part campaign led by NATO or the U.N. to first divide refugees equitably between countries that can support them, then to transport the refugees to those countries, and finally to assist them throughout the resettlement process.

For the first part, the percentage of refugees that countries could take would be divided based on revenue, landmass, and current population, to figure out how many refugees each place could support. Planning this division would allow for us to avoid situations like those in Pakistan and Iran, where countries have too many refugees to support, so they end up being deported or living with inadequate resources.

The transportation part of the plan would require commitment from countries to spend the necessary resources for the refugees' travel, as well as strong cooperation between the countries. It would also be necessary to have an organizational plan to oversee the process.

The refugees' successful integration into communities would require them to be relocated along with friends and family, and into areas with people of their culture. This would make the division process more complicated, but ultimately more effective. I don't believe it would be so difficult that this solution is no longer feasible. This movement could team up with current resettlement agencies to utilize their expertise in navigating the specifics of this resettlement.

The largest obstacle to this solution would be getting enough countries to agree. I think now is the best chance we have for that to happen. The current refugees from Ukraine are receiving global support, which could translate to support for a plan that will help refugees of all ethnicities.

Inside these communities it would be important for people to be welcoming towards refugees. They could do that by supporting the organizations in charge of resettlement in any way they can, such as volunteering and donating. It would also be important for people and communities to stand up against racist behavior to make refugees feel safe and supported. I personally would attempt to be especially welcoming towards refugees coming into my school and assist them with settling into the school community.

The crisis in Ukraine has proven that as an international community we are capable of showing empathy towards refugees. Now we must use momentum inspired by the Ukraine crisis to reform the world's views and responses towards refugees.

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