

GHOSTS OF ISTANBUL:

# Afghans at the Margins of Precarity



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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS



DGMM	Directorate General of Migration Management
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
LFIP	Law on Foreigners and International Protection
MoI	Ministry of Interior
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PDMM	Provincial Directorate of Migration Management
PDPA	Marxist People's Democratic Party
RSD	Refugee Status Determination
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USA	United States of Amerika
WWII	World War Two

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**This** report, by turning the spotlight on the city of Istanbul, aims to improve understanding of the Afghan migratory movement that is intensely associated with regional preconditions in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey. The report thereby links the precarious conditions of Afghan population living in Istanbul to wider historical, social, economic and political infrastructures of the region. The main objective of this research is to grasp various forms of long-standing precarity produced in Afghanistan, speeded on the move and clinched in Turkey. With that objective, the report details the international, legal, institutional and economic aspects of the production of precarity among Afghan community.

The research is based on 50 semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with Afghans in various Istanbul districts, namely Zeytinburnu, Esenyurt, Tuzla and Beykoz. Istanbul is selected as the main venue of research due to its unique composition inhabiting the largest population of unregistered and undocumented Afghans working in the labor market. The city generally hosts five main categories of Afghan population: (i) those who are undocumented without passports or with expired visas, (ii) those who have been registered in different satellite cities but informally live in Istanbul, (iii) those who are in transit to reach Europe, (iv) oldcomers who have residence permit or citizenship, and (v) those who arrive via official ways for business or education. Among these five categories, the majority of Afghans in Istanbul is composed of young, undocumented Afghan men denoting the predominant composition of the Afghan presence in the city. While our sample captures the differences in the Afghan community, it simultaneously reflects the macro-level distribution with 42 persons who fall into the first three categories (34 undocumented without passports, 7 registered in different city, 1 expired registration). Out of these 42 persons living in Istanbul informally, 31 Afghans are single, young men, 10 Afghans are married men and one is a married woman. Those who belong to the fourth and fifth categories, with residence permit or Turkish citizenship, contain 5 women and 3 men (mixed of single, married or divorced). Additionally, in our sample, we aimed to grasp ethnic or kinship-based cleavages within the Afghan community. Among 50 interviewees, there are 16 Uzbeks, 16 Tajiks, 9 Pashtuns, 5 Turkmens, 1 Hazara, and 1 Arabic in addition to the two unspecified.

The report firstly shed lights on the two main routes in reaching Turkey: the first one starts from Afghanistan to Pakistan and then Iran; and the second one begins directly from Afghanistan to Iran via obtained visa. The testimonies of our respondents draw out the precarious journey of Afghans from Afghanistan through Pakistan and Iran ultimately to Turkey, which contains infinite numbers of perils lurking in the relentless geographical conditions of steep mountains and vast deserts. In the report, we reanimate all steps of these journeys by portraying and visualizing the dangerous routes, the vehicles they use, the smugglers, bandits and border forcers they have to deal with in addition to the unending negotiations, struggles and even clashes among Afghans. Overall, the report tracks Afghans' journey, which stretches over large territories into weeks and months under treacherous circumstances, in order to critically depict their extremely precarious living conditions on the way to Turkey, particularly to the city of Istanbul.

The report secondly examines the production and reproduction of various forms and levels of precarity that continues in Istanbul. In this regard, the potential hierarchies within the Afghan community





are unpacked throughout the report. The oldcomers who now hold residence permits or citizenship as well those who came through official procedures represent the most privileged group that lays the foundation of the chain of networks. In addition to their privileged legal status, the duration of stay in Istanbul is highly influential in terms of social capital. Relatively early comers, who are referred as “*muhaberat*”, symbolize the hubs within the network that accommodates the newcomers. This study indicates that apart from the oldcomers who have social and economic capital resulting from their legal status, there is a well-connected, highly closed and introvert network among Afghans without legal status, in which they solve problems rather than asking for help from outsiders.

The undocumented and unregistered Afghans, constituting the majority, represent the largest precarious labor force, as they are subjected to the hardest working conditions in Istanbul. They carry out a wide spectrum of bodily labor in sectors such as construction, repair shop, manufacturing, transportation, car mechanic, garbage/paper collection, etc. They get paid incredibly low daily prices and exposed to countless exploitative treatments by their employers. The accounts of our interviewees point out that Afghans constantly shift from one job to another and in parallel from one place to another, wherever jobs are available. Without having any social life, they are compelled to work without rest to send remit back to their families in Afghanistan. Our research underlines that the Afghan population in Istanbul constitutes a considerable manual labor force in which their bodily and ascetic labor symbolizes their one and only capital.

The report thirdly analyzes the relationship between invisibility and mobility of Afghans in Istanbul. While undocumented and unregistered respondents describe how they minimize contact due to their fear of deportation, they simultaneously demonstrate high levels of mobility in the labor market. This designates a tension between politics of condonation and securitization. It is suggested in the report that *modus operandi* behind the governance of deportation is based on a balance between these two politics, condonation and securitization, what we call as “mobility-security nexus” in which highly mobile labor force of Afghans is tolerated by the authorities unless security concerns or high political stakes appear on the table. The institutional and bureaucratic barriers in legal protection such as rejected applications, indeterminate circulation for legal access from one city to another, closed registration in Istanbul etc., prepare the grounds for this *modus operandi* that produces systematic illegalization of Afghans in Istanbul. As a result, Afghans informally move to Istanbul to find a job, where they have to live totally invisible lives out of the fear of deportation. Accordingly, they live on the margins of precarity. Invisibility enforced by their living conditions simultaneously intersects with the blindness of international community and civil society towards them. Due to their undocumented and invisible life, they are abandoned by the regimes of international protection as well as the scope of civil society whose aid and assistance become inaccessible to them.

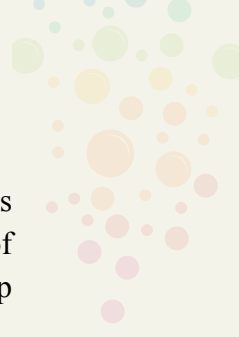
# 1. INTRODUCTION

**Afghan** refugees represent one of the world's largest protracted refugee populations over the last decades. Millions of Afghans have fled from the country, been forced to leave their homes, lived in refugee camps for generations, been denied their rights, and constantly threatened with deportation. According to the report released by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the increase in civilian casualties in the conflict has reached the highest recorded number in the year of 2018 (UNAMA, 2018). The Institute for Peace and Economics published its annual Global Peace Index in June 2019 and stated that Afghanistan is the “world's least peaceful” country ranking even beyond Syria (RFE/RL, 2019). By being at the bottom of the index, Afghanistan has been witnessing intensified armed conflict, suicide attacks, bombings and aerial operations, which resulted in 10,993 civilian casualties (3,804 deaths and 7,189 injured) occurred in a single year of 2018. Despite these facts, the Afghan migratory movement, representing *a sui generis* case with respect to its protracted war and violence over four decades, does not receive adequate attention from international community any more.

Shaping and transforming a wide regional terrain, the Afghan migratory movement has a decades-long history of forced mobility both within and from Afghanistan. Currently, Pakistan hosts more than 1.5 million of registered Afghan refugees in addition to approximately one million more unregistered ones. In a similar vein, Iran as another neighboring country hosts the second largest group of Afghan refugees. It was documented by the UNHCR that last couple of years have been the record in migration, estimating around 1.5 to two million undocumented Afghans on the move to Iran (Amnesty International, 2019).

The long-lasting war and violence inevitably go hand in hand with extreme levels of unemployment, poverty, landlessness, and lack of basic services. Despite the unending and ever-surging violence in the country, the international community still lacks long-term protection and asylum regimes that would respond to the structural conditions in Afghanistan. In 2015, Afghans were the second largest refugee group within the massive migratory movement from Turkey to Europe, coming after Syrians. The current numbers indicate that they have been among the highest in terms of the number of arrivals in the post-2015 period. Since then, Afghans have become the largest migratory group pursuing very dangerous clandestine journeys to reach Europe for asylum. In their long journey from Afghanistan to Europe, Turkey locates on their way as the country of both transit and destination, connecting diverse transnational networks. While many Afghans seek to settle in Turkey temporarily or permanently, many others continue their journeys non-stop to other regions, mainly in the Global North. In their indeterminate journeys, Afghans fill the newspaper pages with their beaten, shot or washed ashore bodies or as statistics of arrivals, deaths or deportations.

The current circumstances signal a much required attention to Afghan refugees and their long-lasting precarious living conditions, which has been further worsened since the early 2010s, in Turkey. Therefore, both the policies of inclusive and long-winded integration and focus of research should be widened given the emerging cynosure of the Afghan movement since 2018. The



increase in the Afghan movement to Turkey as well as from Turkey to Europe in the last two years and the large quantity of Afghan deportations call for a grounded and detailed investigation of the Afghan case, which is dramatically absent at the moment. This research aims to fill this gap through an inclusive practice-based approach.


This research aims to achieve four main objectives:

- (i) An analysis of extremely precarious living conditions of Afghans in their everyday life referring to their illegalized existence easily subjected to various forms of exploitation in labor market, accommodation, medical care, and throughout their desperate journeys.
- (ii) An examination of international, legal, and institutional obstacles constantly producing irregularities for the Afghan community in the absence of protection regime.
- (iii) A nuanced perspective in unpacking socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic/kinship-based differences within the Afghan community.
- (iv) An investigation of established networks as well as solidarity and survival strategies among the Afghan community.

The existing scholarship on the Afghan community in Turkey generally adopts either macro or micro levels of analyses. The macro level analyses (Mixed Migration Centre, 2020; Alakuş and Yıldız 2020; Kuschminder, 2018; İçduygu and Karadağ, 2018; Alemi et al., 2017; DGMM and Hacettepe University, 2017; Bizhan, 2016; Kuschminder et al., 2015; İçduygu and Aksel, 2012) containing survey-based, quantitative or secondary data collection seek to provide a larger picture of the motivations, intentions, and patterns in the Afghan migratory movement. Micro level analyses (Bozok and Bozok, 2019; Geyik Yıldırım, 2018; Aygül, 2018; Jarahzarah, 2016; Kaytaz 2016; Özservet, 2013), on the other hand, delve into particular spatial or community-based contexts. This research aims to provide an original and innovative contribution to the aforementioned state of the art through carrying out a nuanced investigation of the Afghan community in Istanbul by paying attention to their legal, socio-economic, and ethnic/kinship-based differences within the contextualized and historicized background of Afghanistan.

In this study, the mapping of the Afghan community in Istanbul is expanded to the wider spatial and temporal journeys of persons. Their long-standing precarity begins at their home country, steps up during their migratory movement, and crystalizes in Turkey. The characteristics of Afghans in Istanbul are strongly determined by regional preconditions including not only those of Afghanistan and Turkey but also of Pakistan and Iran. Thus, the report connects micro analysis of Afghans in Istanbul to the wider historical, social, cultural, and political infrastructures of the region. In so doing, the report provides a historical and contextual perspective on the Afghan movement by turning its focus on the city of Istanbul.

The report consists of six chapters. Following the Introduction, **Chapter 2** explains the details of research methodology, including the significance of Istanbul as the main venue of the research, the composition of our sample in detail, and the strategies to reach our respondents. **Chapter 3** provides historical background of Afghanistan since the early twentieth century and particularly from 1970s onwards to emphasize the root causes behind this long migratory movement and to draw attention to a country blasted to smithereens by multiple local and foreign actors. **Chapter 4**, which is the major body of results and analysis, discusses various forms of precarity of Afghans



under three subheadings: (i) precarious journey from Afghanistan to Istanbul, (ii) living conditions in Istanbul by highlighting the vulnerabilities caused by being undocumented and exposure to cruel labor conditions, (iii) mobility-security nexus referring to a balance between practices of toleration and deportation in the governance of illegalized Afghan population. **Chapter 5** contains concluding remarks while **Chapter 6** offers a series of policy recommendations.


## 2. METHODOLOGY

The research centers the experiences and subjectivities of the Afghan community living in Istanbul. The qualitative primary data was collected between July and October 2020. We conducted 50 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Afghans in the districts of Zeytinburnu, Esenyurt, Tuzla and Beykoz (Küçüksu). The interviews were carried out both online and face-to-face. Thanks to the relatively safer circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic during the summer period, we managed to reach Afghans living in the abovementioned districts for face-to-face interviews. Yet, 12 out of 50 interviews were conducted online due to the unavailability of the interlocutors and the pandemic-related obstacles in the early fall of 2020.

In addition to interviews with Afghans, 9 in-depth, semi-structured online interviews were conducted with the representatives of Afghan associations, non-governmental and international organizations, grassroots initiatives, and specialized journalists and human rights activists. The primary data we acquired from the field research was combined with archival and desktop research on the historical analysis of the Afghan migration as well as on legal documents, regulations, and secondary reports. We have also compiled a dataset of news coverage of Afghans and Afghanistan in Turkey in order to understand how they were re-presented in the media.

The city of Istanbul is selected as the main venue of research since it inhabits the vast majority of irregular Afghans working in the labor market. Istanbul is not only the largest city in Turkey, but it also hosts the largest number of migrant groups and magnitude of labor force and informal sector. Additionally, the city represents a hub for transit networks and journeys seeking to reach Europe. Since Turkey still retains the geographical limitation referring that the refugee status is only granted to people originating from Europe, asylum seekers from non-European countries are subjected to refugee status determination (RSD) by which they can be resettled in a third country. Those people are considered under “conditional refugee status” implying the temporal stay in pre-determined “satellite cities”. This structure indicates that non-European asylum seekers in Turkey need to be registered in satellite cities designated by state authorities until their resettlement is actualized. Both asylum applicants waiting for their RSD and those under conditional refugee status are considered as non-Syrians under international protection. Istanbul is not among those satellite cities, which means that there is no official registration process for those who apply for international protection. Even though they make the asylum application in Istanbul, they are eventually appointed to smaller satellite cities.

In practice, the institutional and administrative infrastructure in Turkey produces large numbers of unregistered and undocumented migrants residing in Istanbul. Due to job shortage in small satellite cities, migrants prefer to move to Istanbul to take part in informal labor market. In general, Istanbul hosts five main categories of Afghan migrants: (i) those who are undocumented with either expired visas or without passports, (ii) those who have been registered in different satellite cities but live in Istanbul informally and thus lose the opportunity of asylum application, (iii) those who wait to arrange networks and saving to cross into Europe, (iv) the oldcomers who already have residence permit or even citizenship, and finally (v) those who come via official ways for education or business.



In our sample, we aimed to capture the differences in the Afghan community living in Istanbul. The overwhelming majority belongs to the first three categories as mentioned above. Single, young and undocumented Afghan men constitute the largest proportion, symbolizing the character of Afghan population in Istanbul (Mixed Migration Centre, 2020). Reflecting the macro-level statistics, in our sample, there are 42 persons who belong to the first three categories (34 undocumented without passports, 7 registered in different city, 1 expired registration). Out of these 42 persons living in Istanbul informally, 31 Afghans are single young men (engaged men are also live without their partners in Turkey), 10 Afghans are married men and one is a married woman. Those who belong to the fourth and fifth categories, with residence permit or Turkish citizenship, contain 5 women and 3 men (mixed of single, married or divorced).

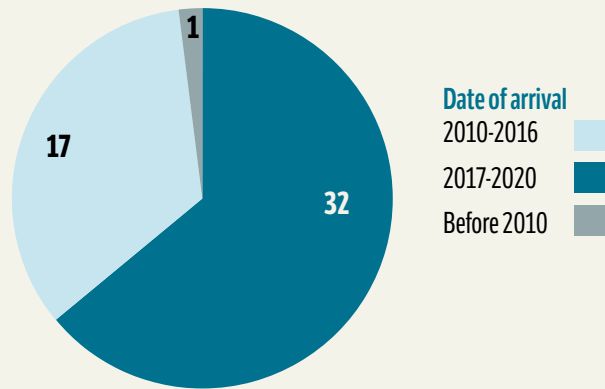
Out of the total numbers of interlocutors (50 persons), there are 6 women (3 married, 2 single, 1 divorced) and 44 men (3 engaged, 12 married, 29 single). Since the city of Istanbul is *sui generis* case accommodating the majority of undocumented populations in Turkey, as reflected in our sample, the main profile of Afghans thereby corresponds to young and single men in high density. Due this phenomenon, the gender perspective in the research has remained limited.

The distribution of age among our 50 respondents indicates that 37 persons are under the age of 30 while 17 of them are under 25 years old. The date of arrivals shows that the majority entered Turkey in the post-2017 period at the time when the violence has intensified with the Taliban's domination in the country (32 persons). This number decreases to 17 persons who came in the years of 2010-2016. Additionally, in our sample, we aimed to grasp ethnic or kinship-based cleavages within the Afghan community in order to observe potential hierarchies within their networks. Among 50 interviewees, there are 16 Uzbeks, 16 Tajiks, 9 Pashtuns, 5 Turkmens, 1 Hazara, and 1 Arabic in addition to the two unspecified.

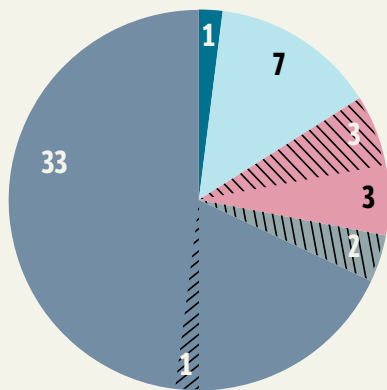
During our field research, the undocumented and unregistered Afghans were the hardest ones to reach. Since they are considerably invisible, isolated and distrustful to outsiders, we tried to come up with alternative ways. Throughout our field research, we worked together with three Afghan assistants who pursue their education in Istanbul. Their involvement in the field notably shaped and strengthened our capacity to reach our respondents, and to build relations based on trust. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in Farsi language later to be transcribed and translated into Turkish and English. Our fourth assistant conducted face-to-face interviews with Uzbek or Turkmen Afghans who speak Turkish. 12 online interviews out of 50 were done via Skype/WhatsApp. The data was collected after the well-informed and explicit consent of our respondents. To maintain their anonymity and confidentiality, nicknames are used in reference to our interviewees.

Nonetheless, there are still uncovered dynamics that was not possible to capture via interviews. The Afghan population in Turkey generally represents the most isolated, introverted, and closely connected community, which made it difficult to delve into the potential hierarchies and exploitation mechanisms among them. Though we managed to seize on numerous aspects, there are still yet others waiting to be unpacked.

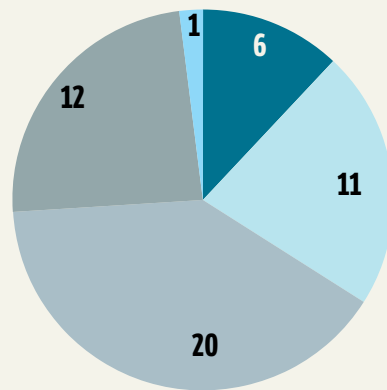
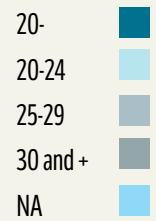
Distribution among 50 respondents based on their legal status, age, gender, marital status, date of arrival, and ethnic/kinship-based cleavages



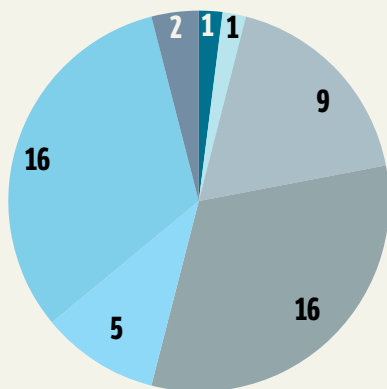
**Legal status**



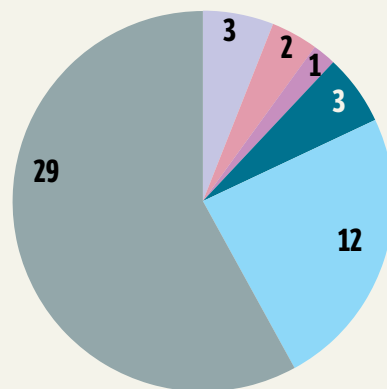
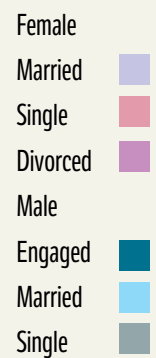
**Age**



**Ethnic/kinship cleavages**



**Marital status**



# 3. AFGHANISTAN: A COUNTRY IN ASHES

The compiled dataset of news coverage indicate how the image of Afghan and Afghanistan is depicted in Turkey. The mostly repeated words, such as “death”, “bomb attack”, “conflict”, and “shepherd” tragically designate a country in ashes.

Mobility has become an inseparable part of the social fabric, especially in the last four decades in Afghanistan. Since the 1970s, the movement of the population has taken place within or from Afghanistan due to the desperate circumstances related to insecurity, political discrimination, poverty and protracted war and conflict (Monsutti, 2008; McChesney, 2013; İçduygu and Karadağ, 2018). Thus, Afghan refugees are incredibly unique in their long-lasting exile status. Afghanistan holds a leading role as a source country producing a massive, forced displacement that transforms not only its neighboring countries but also the larger region extending from Middle East to Europe. Hence, Afghan refugees epitomize *a sui generis* case with respect to their long-lasting migratory movement that has been neglected by the international community.

The current situation of Afghanistan is deeply related to its past encounters with colonialism, foreign interventions, and long-lasting wars, all of which have disrupted the processes of nation-building, institutionalization, social cohesion, and the development of infrastructure. The history of the twentieth century in Afghanistan illustrates the initial attempts to establish the monopoly of state power by foreign regimes in Kabul, by British monarchies (1880-1978) and the communist regimes of Soviet Union (1978-1992); and later attempts that have shattered this monopoly in the 1980s when multiple jihadi groups received weapons and cash from various foreign sources to fight the Soviet-backed communist regime (Shahrani and Confield, 1984; Saikal, 2012; McChesney, 2013; Mukhopadhyay 2014; Shahrani, 2018). After benefiting the British subsidies and technical support for decades, the declaration of independence in 1919 brought about the cease of flow of such resources, which not only seriously impeded centralization, Pashtunization, and modernization programs but ultimately led to civil war. Heavily investing on modern technologies of warfare, following the WWII, the country’s foreign dependence grew even further. As a non-aligned country throughout a good portion of the Cold War, Afghanistan’s ability to extract support from both Western and Eastern powers culminated a strong centralized military force, which gave almost no incentive for the political elite to provide social services such as education, health care, communication, and economic development projects to citizens (Shahrani, 2018). In addition, distribution of such services was largely based on certain ethno-linguistic, tribal, regional differences, mostly in favor of Pashtun tribesmen, which created deeper rifts among the heterogeneous Afghan society.

Afghanistan is a country where political, ethnic, religious, kinship-based divisions between 18 large and small groups in social, economic and political life are significant. The term of *qawm* refers to ethnic, religious, or kinship-based cleavages in the country. Pashtuns make up nearly



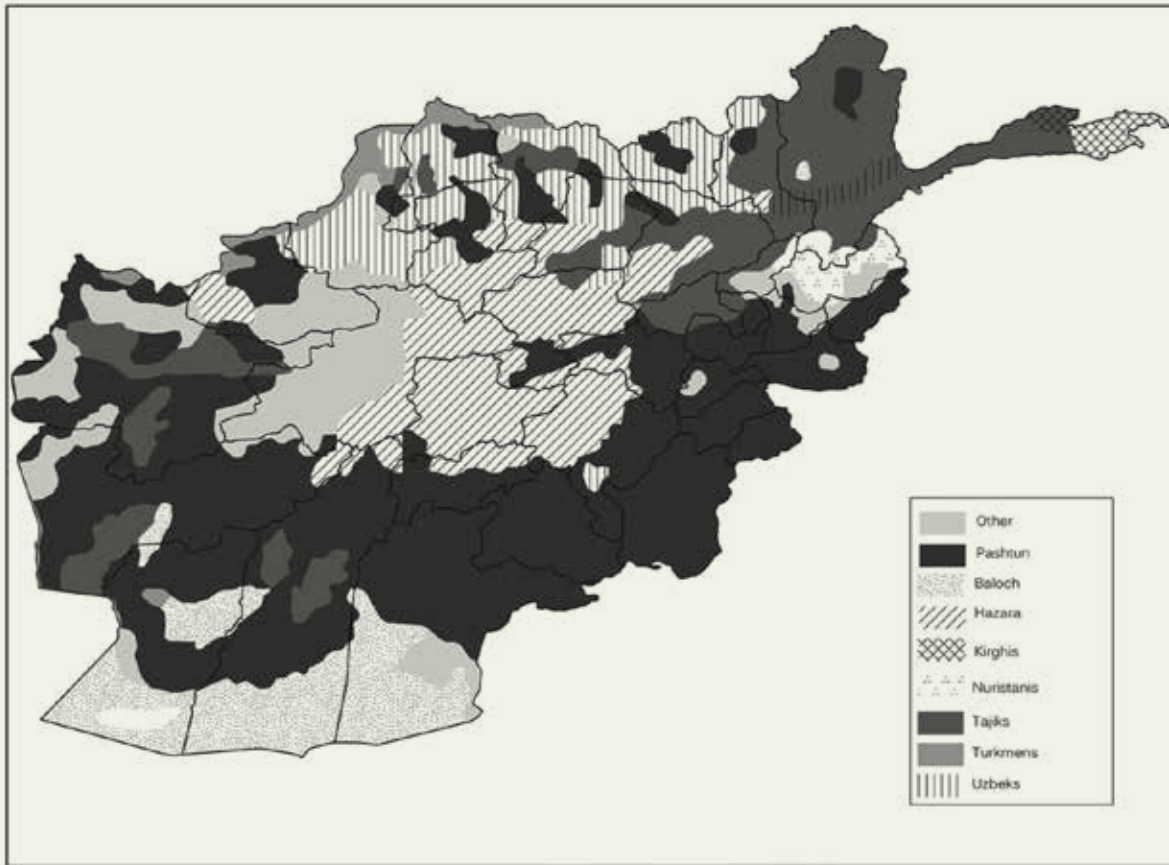



Figure 1: Geographical distribution of *qawms* (ethnic, religious or kinship-based cleavages) Source: Shahrani (2018)

half of the country's population whereas Tajiks (%27), Hazaras (%9), Uzbeks (%9), Aymaks (%4), Turkmens (%3) and Balochis (%2) constitute other significant groups. Pashtuns, mainly located in Afghanistan's southern and south-eastern regions, belong to the Sunni-Hanafi religious sect and are the dominant group in the state bureaucracy of Afghanistan. The Pashtuns' tribal organization and fractured structure, however, restrain their political power. Most of the Tajiks, the second-most populous group after Pashtuns, are Muslims belonging to the Sunni-Hanafi religious sect like the Pashtuns. Tajiks live in the northern, northeastern and western parts of the country. They do not have a distinct social system, although they constitute a quarter of the country, and are partly excluded from the state bureaucracy; their power is therefore limited. It is known that the Taliban frequently target Tajik groups and therefore Tajiks frequently cooperate with international actors against the Taliban. The Hazaras constitute the third-largest population in the country after Tajiks. Unlike the Pashtuns and Tajiks, the Hazaras mostly belong to the Shia sect.

In April 1978, when the Marxist People's Democratic Party (PDPA) overthrew the government and established a secular communist regime, Muslim Brotherhood declared a jihad in the country (Schmeidl, 2002; 2011). The war was intensified with the invasion of Soviet army in 1979 which led to forced displacement of 3.9 million Afghan refugees escaping to Pakistan and Iran (Schmeidl, 2002). After the Soviet Union's withdrawal from the country, the international assistance pioneered by the UNHCR began on a large scale. However, during the period of 1992-1996, the war between numerous *mujahideen* fighters maintained and even proliferated with the join of the Taliban. Throughout the 1990s, the regional self-governments along ethno-linguistic and tribal cleavages were predominant (McChesney, 2013; Shahrani, 2018). Minor ethnic communities had



their well-armed jihadi *qumandans* controlling their ethnic/tribal territories. Destructive proxy wars of the 1990s took place either among *qumandans* or against to the Taliban. As Shahrani (2018) argues, in order to finance the wars, most of the *qumandans* participated in drug running, smuggling, and other criminal activities in conjunction with systematic human rights violations, which evokes the experience in many postcolonial states in the history witnessing endless civil wars nourished by multiethnic cleavages in the society.

Between 1996 and 2001, the Taliban seized control in the capital and the majority of Afghan territory while the *mujahideen* forces were united to fight against the Taliban control. The Taliban regime based on the Sharia rules resulted in massive human rights violations particularly affecting women's rights, education, and socio-cultural life (İçduygu and Karadağ, 2018). As asserted by Schmeidl (2002), by the year of 2000, new migratory movements from Afghanistan began and incredibly increased afterwards.

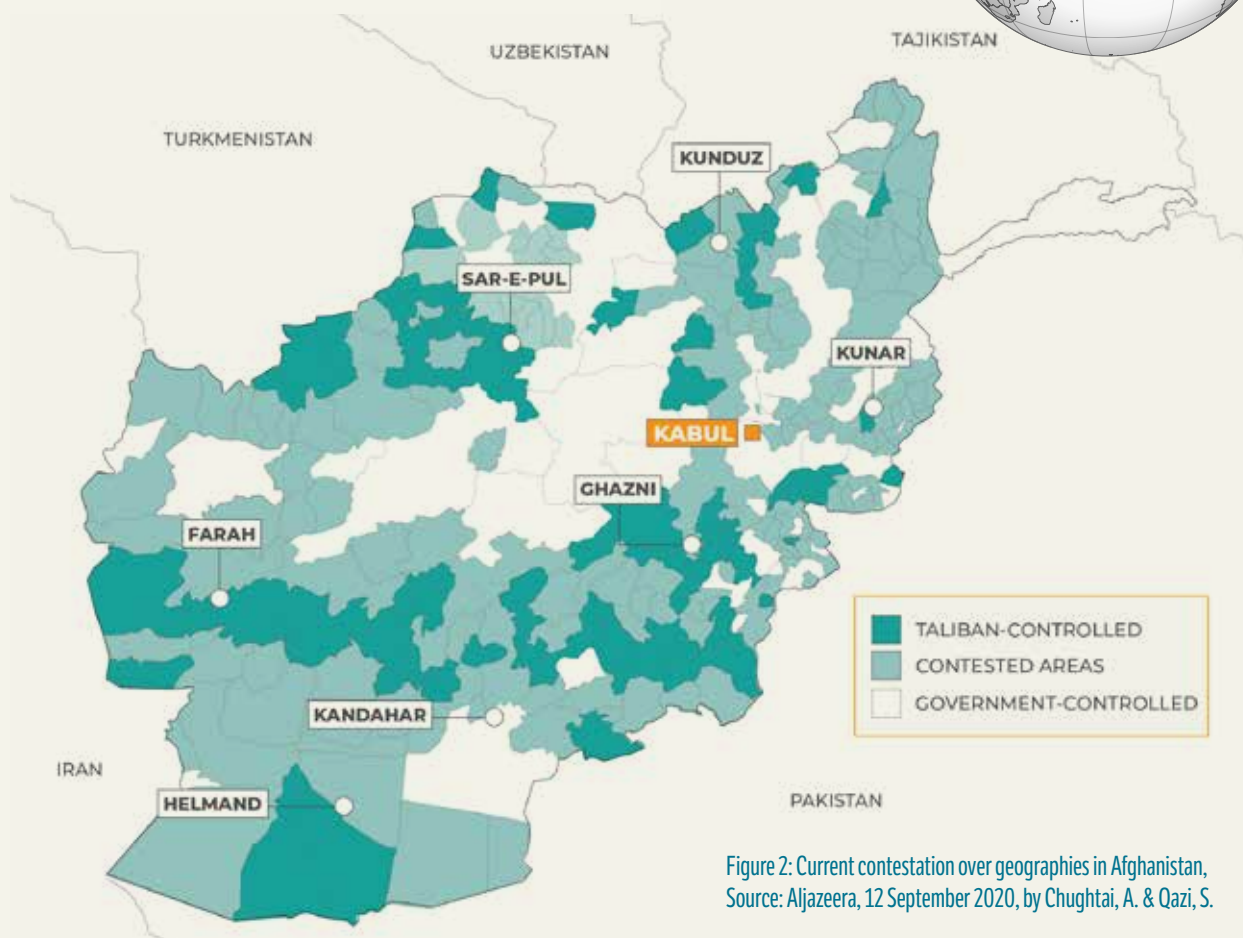
The US-led invasion in October 2001 under the so-called “global war on terror” was another breaking point in the recent history of Afghanistan. It led to the forced movement of 2.15 million Afghans by 2002 (Margesson, 2007). During that time, the UNHCR started to operate the largest assisted repatriation operation in its history facilitating the return of more than four million Afghan refugees (İçduygu and Karadağ, 2018). Following the occupation of the US-led coalition, different ethnicities have taken different positions vis-à-vis the foreign forces and the new political elite supported by them. The formerly favored Pashtun communities took a more defiant stance against the occupying forces. As sexually segregated communities, Pashtuns had stern codes of honor, but competing models of gender roles replaced the stern code of masculinity and strict model of gender roles after the Western occupation in the 2000s. As a marginalized people within the social-ethnic-religious composition of Afghanistan, Hazaras were more receptive to Western occupation and the Karzai government, who provided them with services of education and employment, which they were formerly deprived of.

In the post-2008 period, despite the increase of US troops in Afghanistan, the Obama administration announced that the combat mission would be withdrawn in 2011. During the attempts for a peace talk between the USA and the Taliban in 2018, which has been a fluctuated process, the civilian casualties dramatically rose as the Taliban expanded their military campaign in different parts of the country (Aljazeera, 12 September 2020). The map below indicates the magnitude of the Taliban-controlled territories in addition to the ongoing contestation over certain geographies.

According to the IDMC statistics, the extent of new conflict-related displacements increased steadily between 2009 and 2016. 652,000 new displacements in 2016, 474,000 in 2017 and 372,000 in 2018 were estimated. Majority of them occurred in the east, north and north-east of the country. Besides excruciating levels of violence, the natural disasters in the country contributed to large numbers of displacements. Approximately 250,000 people in total were affected in 2019. Seasonal rains, floods and landslides frequently affect the northern regions. In 2019, floods caused 111,000 new displacements in addition to the worst drought in decades in 2018 triggering more than 371,000 displacements. The food insecurity increased across the country since 2018.

For decades, millions of Afghans have fled to Pakistan, Iran, Central Asia, Turkey, and the European countries, in order to escape from the war, violence, mass killings, international interventions, poverty, and natural disasters that devastated the country especially since the 1970s. The decades of war and conflicts, whose producers, financiers, and managers were both national and

## AFGHANISTAN Who controls what



foreign powers, together with the demise of central political authority, profoundly affected the social fabric of Afghanistan. As a consequence, collective identities were politicized, interpersonal and intergroup relations were drastically changed, the nation-state structures were destroyed, distrust between the state and citizens became endemic, and millions of people were internally, regionally, and globally displaced. Infrastructures and traditional mechanisms of social control were destroyed, women were excluded from social life, and the ruling elites, both the Taliban and the US-led occupation forces, mismanaged resources, namely pasture, water, minerals, forests, and state-owned lands.

The continuous influxes of international funds in the post-Taliban era have done little to remedy and resolve Afghanistan's problems. The country is now among the worst cases on health indexes like child, infant, and maternal mortality. Groups that are left out of the distribution of resources and services (one third of the country's population - about nine million people) by the country's political elite continue to live in poverty while a large segment of expenditures flow into security investments. Afghanistan ranks 168<sup>th</sup> out of 178 countries in the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2018).

# 4. CONSTANT REPRODUCTION OF PRECARIETY

In this section the constant precarity of Afghans will be elaborated in its various forms. Their precarity starts in their home country, moves along their journeys, and continues in Istanbul. Based on the testimonies of the respondents, the forms of precarity are discussed under three subheadings. In the first section, the devastating journey is portrayed step by step as Afghans move and struggle to survive. In the second part, their living conditions in Istanbul are explored in terms of how they become the major source of manual labor force in the city of Istanbul, constituting the bottom stratum within the informal sector. Hence, their ascetic bodies become their one and only capital in order to survive and remit back to their families in Afghanistan. Within their invisible and introvert life, they establish close network among each other connecting the newcomers to relatively earlier ones. In the third section, the tension between the high mobility of Afghans and the politics of deportation is examined. While Afghans constantly move from one place to another wherever jobs are available, they simultaneously feel the fear of deportation at every moment in their daily life. The anecdotes given by the respondents show that Afghans' high mobility is tolerated by the authorities for the sake of the informal labor market unless a security concern arises. What it is called as "mobility-security nexus" explains the dynamics of precarity generated by the political and institutional barriers as well as lack of international protection and civil society. As a result of all this, Afghans, being at the margins of precarity, pursue a totally invisible life where they create their own ways of resilience.

## 4.1. ON THE MOVE: JOURNEY FROM AFGHANISTAN TO TURKEY

Abdul started his journey in 2017, right after his survival from the prison of the Taliban. "I was a teacher in Afghanistan. The Taliban occupied our region and forced me to blow up the school. They hate education. When I stood out against, they imprisoned and severely tortured me for one and half year" says Abdul. His father pays a large amount of money by selling their properties to save his son from the Taliban, and ultimately fleeing from the country appears to be the only option to be alive. Fatima, from the city of Kunduz, was born in a poor family working with farming and being exposed to the threats and torture of the Taliban since her brother was a soldier in the government. "One day they kidnapped my brother, and my father passed away with a heart attack when he heard that" tells Fatima, a 27-year-old Afghan woman left with the dead bodies of his father and his brother. Their tortured bodies were brought a week later. Not only had that, after the death of his father, the Taliban also forced her three teenager sisters (around thirteen years old) to marry them and finally their house was burned down during the fight between the Taliban and government military forces.




Targeted by suicide bombs, increasingly heavy fighting and even drone warfare between the Taliban and the regime forces, mass killings and civilian casualties by the Taliban, ISIS or military operations carried out by regime forces, the painful testimonies of our respondents portray these incredibly violent, suppressive, and exploitative conditions of Afghanistan as a result of the 40-year long war and conflict. Economic destitution, extreme poverty, and dispossession are directly precipitated by this long conflict that results in continuous forced mobility of the Afghan population. Mobility becomes the inevitable aspect of Afghan social life to survive, as our respondents mostly refer, “you have to be on the move to stay alive”.

The journey from Afghanistan to Turkey is a long-drawn-out and grueling one brimmed with infinite number of perils and filled with fear of death. This treacherous route through high mountains and deserts involves stages of being transferred from one smuggler to another, and it takes weeks or even months to reach Turkey. In each step, exposure to the harsh conditions of nature is combined with the encounters with bandits and border guards. The travel to Turkey often brings about countless unexpected events on the way; and at every step, negotiations and struggles are carried out with smugglers, bandits, border forces in addition to fatal geographical conditions. Within the absence of a clear start and definite end, it is hard to (re)generate the distinctive traits of the journey but nonetheless the accounts of our respondents illustrate a pattern of transnational networks as well as actors and facilitators.

The accounts in our fieldwork indicate two main routes on the way to Turkey: the first route starts with an unauthorized journey from Afghanistan to Pakistan and then Iran; and the second one consists of visa entry into Iran. Although clandestine travel directly from Afghanistan to Iran is another option, those who participated in our interviews commonly did not share such experience. While there might be numerous structural factors for the aforesaid outcome, it might simply be an accidental result of our sample. However, an interesting quote from one of our respondents, a 28-year-old Afghan man signals the former, “those who have money generally take visa to Iran, but for those without money the illegal way through Pakistan is the common option”.

#### 4.1.1. FROM AFGHANISTAN TO PAKISTAN AND IRAN

Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan is the central location on the way to reach the border city with Pakistan, Nimruz. Afghans from different districts gather in Kabul after reaching their contact person and then travel by bus to Nimruz, which is the main hub for smuggling networks. In some cases, they have to wait for couple of days in the city for others to join the group. “We were three friends from Samangan, agreed with a smuggler from Mazari Sharif for 1400\$ for each” says our 19-year-old respondent while he was sharing the details of his desperate journey back in 2018: “We went to Kabul first and then to Nimruz by bus. We had to stay for a week in Nimruz because the group had not been reached to enough number. We waited there to be 40 people to move to Pakistan”. A 25-year-old Afghan who started his journey six years ago describes a similar route map that begins in the city of Kunduz, one of the most insecure cities witnessing a long-standing conflict between the Taliban and the government. He explains that he paid around 2000\$ to smuggler to take him from Kabul to Nimruz, Pakistan and then Iran. The accounts of our interviewees depict Nimruz as a space of gathering organized by a large network of smugglers before reaching the border of Pakistan. The story of Ali who is a 22-year-old young man takes the lid off the particular details of his dangerous journey took place in June 2020:



“My friend came to me and asked, “I found a smuggler, are you going to Turkey?” “If you are serious, I am in,” I said, “whenever you want.” We went home and two hours later we came back with backpacks. We had five thousand Afghan liras and our families were not OK with us leaving for Turkey. So, we took off all by ourselves. We went from Kabul to Nimruz by bus. We called our families and told them we are on our way to Turkey. “You already started the journey” they said, “our prayers are with you”. There are three-wheeled cars what we call as Rickshaw in Nimruz. We started our three-hour journey with a Rickshaw. Then we changed to a Toyota car, 28 people in total, squeezed in, and one on top of the other. The car was too fast, we avoided a lot of perils but not the sand. It was all over us. We traveled like that for 24 hours. When we arrived at the border to Pakistan, our smuggler changed and we again squeezed into a car like the one earlier. The journey lasted until the next morning. At night, we made a stop, took rest, and continued our way.”

Sand dunes and mountainous geography are emphasized by our respondents quite often, in respect to their fatal conditions because of the geography as well as bandits and border guards. Having passed through all these fearful moments, Ali goes on:

“We reached a sandy mountain, which we climbed over on foot while the cars could get through without any passengers. At one point we had to pay 600 Toman [Iranian official currency] for each to the smuggler. But he did not give us any water, so we passed the night with sand all over us. Later he had us get on the car again. From there, we cruised through Pakistani land and were about to reach the Iran border. We spent 3 nights by a river, we had only 5 thousand Afghan liras and it all ran out. When the Pakistani police asked 8000 Toman for each person, we had no money, so a friend of ours sold his phone and with that we could pay the police. But without any phone, we could not call our smuggler. If you have no or not enough money, you either borrow money, sell your stuff or get beaten up a lot.”

Endless journey never stops; being constantly on the move under mortal conditions well describes the journeys of Afghans (Monsutti, 2007). Based on the accounts of our respondents it seems the journey in Pakistani territory takes approximately 7 to 15 days. By passing from mountain to mountain on foot for days and nights, Ali finally reaches the Iranian territory together with the others, in his depiction, as if all Afghanistan was there:

“We took off afoot this time. The way was too long so we ran out of foot and there was no clean water. There was some muddy water running and we had to drink it. Believe me, the water reeked so we had to close our nose while drinking it. Animals would not drink that. We walked at night again. Then we reached koh-i muşkil (arduous mountain) at around midnight. We saw that the arduous mountain was really arduous. It was too hard. But there were a lot of passengers around and I thought: “All Afghanistan is here.” We walked another 10 hours, entered into a tunnel, and that is how we reached the Iranian territory.”

At the Pakistani-Iranian borderland, encounter with bandits or nomad communities is highly frequent. The story of Mohammad, in his 20s, takes place in the same month as Ali’s, in June 2020. He follows an analogical route map, from Samangan to Kabul, Nimruz and Pakistan, but also adding their encounter with Baluchi [they predominantly live in the province of Baluchistan

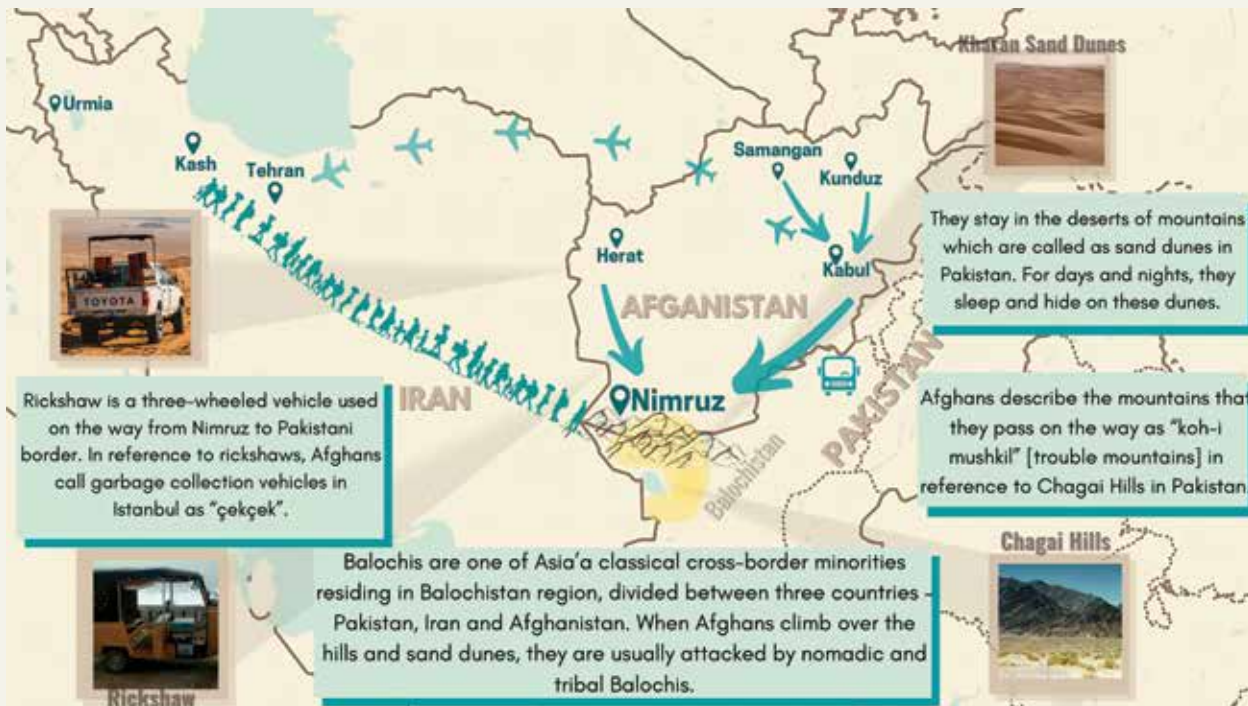


Figure 3: Journey from Afghanistan to Pakistan and Iran The map contains visuals of the routes, mostly used vehicles (rickshaw, Toyota car), high mountains of Chagai and fatal sand dunes of Kharan, and Balochis who are known as nomadic tribes controlling the networks of smuggling in the region. [Created by the Author]

at the Iranian border, mostly pursue nomadic life] community: “After staying in Nimruz for one day, we moved to Pakistan. While we were about to reach the Pakistani-Iranian border, Baluchi people kidnapped us, took all our money. We got beaten like a hell. To crown it all, the smugglers took our leftovers and then ran out”.

For some, arriving at Iranian territory means relatively a safer and shorter passage if you manage to acquire official visa that designates the second route map without stopping by Pakistan. Ahmad decides to leave Afghanistan in 2013, after his city (Konar) was occupied by the Taliban and the radio station where he had worked came under attack. “All people in the radio office were murdered” says Ahmad and tells how attaining Turkish visa from Kabul Embassy was practically impossible: “I applied for Turkish visa, but it was rejected [...]Then I applied for Iranian visa which is easier if you pay the money. I got the Iranian visa and fled to Tehran”. Direct flight to Tehran is the first step before the clandestine journey through Iran with the guidance of smugglers. In this scenario, the deal is often made for the journey from Tehran to Istanbul via border city of Van, which generally costs for 500-600\$ per person.

The duration in Iran depends on the story of each person. Some continue their journey without stopping while others prefer or must stay in Iran in order to work and save money. As mentioned before, each journey has its own spatial and temporal cycle. Ahmad’s journey includes one-year stay in Iran where he works in the farms. On the contrary, Mustafa, a 23-year-old Afghan man, who similarly fled to Iran from Kabul via official visa, carried his travel forward to Turkey without any stay in Iran. Thus, duration in Iran, whether for saving money, temporary settlement or longer life projection that changed after, differs accordingly to the trajectory of each person. In any case, the journey from Iran to Turkey is again a long and tough one, experiencing clandestine movement on the slopes of the mountains, under the fires of security forces, and nearby the breath of wild animals.

## 4.1.2. FROM IRAN TO TURKEY

Ali continues where he left off, the city they arrive in Iran, Kash. The warehouse arranged by the smuggler was a meeting point to be transferred to the next one:

“ He [smuggler] gave us water but not food. After spending 10 days in Iran, we paid 250 Toman each, got into a Toyota car, 28 passengers again, and started our journey to Turkey. We arrived at Maku mountains, where we spend 2 nights and then continued with our new smuggler at around 4 in the afternoon. There were families and children in our convoy. One of the children fell into a pond while walking at night but our friends saved him immediately. We pushed through the barbed wire to pass the border and my lower leg got scarred. Here it is. While passing the border, the Iranian police fired upon us, and that alarmed the Turkish police. That is why we went back to the mountain and stayed at Maku for the night. People were saying “the Turkish police are not letting us through, we cannot pass.” Some passengers got scared and decided not to go to Turkey. I was one of them. The passage was very hard. We told the smuggler to take our money and drive us back to Tehran. “It is impossible” he said. He was Kurdish. He beat up those who wanted to go back. “If you do that, other won’t come” the smuggler said. They promised that we would be able to pass the border this time.”

The attempt to pass the Iranian-Turkish border opens to all kinds of unpredictable events, including fires opened by border guards, attacks of wolves and foxes, and also the possibility of being frozen. Journalist Hale Gönültaş who specializes on migration and migrant testimonies in Turkey, reported and documented her unequalled experience and investigative effort at the Turkey-Iran border, where she and her photographer colleague, Volkan Nakiboğlu, spent a day with a former Turkish smuggler (Gönültaş, 30 December 2020). The smuggler defines smuggling networks between the two countries as “intricate, lucrative, and brimming with challenges” where



Figure 4: Journey from Iran to Turkey. The figure contains major locations of stop at the Turkish-Iranian border where Afghans stay in the ware houses (*khabgah* for Afghans, *shock houses* for smugglers) [Created by the Author]






Figure 5: Photo from the Turkish borders with Iran. [Photo: Volkan Nakiboğlu] Courtesy of Hale Gönültaş and Volkan Nakiboğlu, the author is thankful for their generous sharing.

refugees face with mortal danger in this mountainous region. When border guards attack, refugees stampede into the mountains to hide. Since they have no idea about the routes in the mountains, they sometimes hide behind rocks to spend the night till a smuggler finds them for another crossing attempt. Unfortunately, most of the deaths occur during this clandestine waiting as they either freeze to death or get attacked by wild animals. In his [Turkish smuggler] exact depiction, “there are always bones on this route in the winter and summer. Those who do not know assume they are animal bones. All of them belong to humans eaten by wolves”. The lucky ones survived from this horrendous terrain are taken to what the smuggler calls *shock houses*, the barn-like houses refugees stay before and after crossing attempts. “They are really in shock when they stay in these places” he [smuggler] comments while explaining why these houses are called as such.

In the accounts of our respondents, these *shock houses* are called *khabgah* meaning “dorm” in Farsi. Ali voices what happened after leaving the *khabgah* and during the attack of Turkish police:

“ Our smuggler gave two biscuits per person and told us to be quiet. He got us in the car and took us to the border again. This time we passed through a snowy area and reached the border. But the police were still waiting so we turned back. We stayed nearby for another 3 nights. We walked around, tried different spots. We climbed another mountain but everyone was so tired. We helped each other. Then we finally managed to pass through a barbed wire, some of us got injured. We passed the mountain, walked 2 kilometers, and made a stop to rest. While we were gathering whatever we have to eat, the Turkish police flashed light onto us. One of them came over and said “günaydın”. Everyone immediately got on their feet and started to run away. Some fell down and I ran over one of them. The police opened fire but we managed to escape. My friend like many others had got injured so he was among those who could not make it to the border. We were 250 people in the beginning and only 130 arrived at the Turkish border. I don’t know what happened to the others. ”

Reference to “those who could not make it” is often used by our respondents, and generally the



larger group in the beginning of the journey falls in half when they enter Turkish territory. Nobody knows what happens to those left behind. Ali continues his way together with other survivors but without a smuggler for a while. They keep walking for 12 hours and climb over a mountain in a village by themselves. “There we saw a lot of people” he notes, “people like us, who passed the border without permission”. They stay together for a night on the mountain and their smuggler shows up again:

“ *He took us to a khabgah. Each has to find his own food and water, nobody helps each other. One of the passengers had no water left, so he started crying and begging for water. We gave him some. We walked another 14 hours and reached a road. We slept nearby. A truck that carried refrigerators arrived and half of the passengers got on board. We left behind. Another car arrived. Its driver gave its seat to our smuggler; we got in that car and continued our journey. Finally, we arrived at Van. The smuggler sold us some telephone cards, did not even ask whether we wanted to buy them. While preparing fake IDs, he gave us food twice a day. We paid him and left. After 5 hours, we reached the Van Lake. We boarded a ship on the lake. On our way, a shepherd flashed light; our captain took him as the police and changed his route. He left us on the shore halfway and told us to continue the way afoot.* ”

The Van Lake fills newspaper pages with tragic ends of boats sinking into the cold waters of the lake. As internal bordering practices and checkpoints are intensified in Turkey, the journey becomes even more dangerous. Dozens of people get drowned, washed ashore or disappear in the depths of the lake (Evrensel, 1 July 2020).

Hours of walking on foot starts again after the fake IDs are prepared while they wait in the *khabgah*. They continue walking as a group of 40 for another entire day to reach the bus terminal in Van.

While being taken by the smuggler to a minibus that would take them to Istanbul, they realize that they lose the fake IDs:

“ *The smuggler put 40 of us on a minibus. But we had left our IDs. On our way to Istanbul, the police pulled us over, asked for ID but then let us go. We finally arrived at Istanbul and the driver dropped us off in Üsküdar. We took a cab from there to Zeytinburnu. It costed us 400 TL. A friend of mine, who was waiting for us at Azeri Mosque in Zeytinburnu, paid for the cab.* ”

## 4.2. LIFE IN ISTANBUL

The migratory routes of Afghans to Turkey were based on the sporadic movement of limited number of students or officials before the 1980s. This pattern remained quite stable and limited, and never paved way for a sizable Afghan community in Turkey until the 1980s. The years of 1982/83 designate a milestone for Afghan migratory movement to Turkey (İçduygu and Karadağ, 2018). For Afghan people who were fleeing from violence and conflict in the early 1980s, Turkey decided to plan the transportation and settlement arrangements for the ones who are considered as “soydaş”, based on the status of “Turkish origin and culture”. Since Turkey has geographical




Figure 6: A group of Afghans who have just crossed the Turkish-Iranian border. They arrived Van after 40-days long journey, stayed in a “khabgah” for couple of days and then were abandoned. As they mentioned, there were people who died or severely injured during the journey in Iran. In the photo, they wait to find a way to spend the night and then move on. [Photo: Volkan Nakiboğlu] Courtesy of Hale Gönültaş and Volkan Nakiboğlu, the author is thankful for their generous sharing.

limitation to the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees, she does not provide a refugee status for those who come from non-European countries. 1934 Law of Settlement was the only legal tool of immigration and settlement which facilitates the immigration of non-Europeans only in the case whether they have “Turkish origin and culture”. Over the years of 1982 and 1983, the government reigned by Kenan Evren, the head of the military junta, facilitated the settlement of 4,163 Afghan families in six provinces of Turkey (Tokat, Kırşehir, Sivas, Şanlıurfa, Van and Hatay) (İçduygu and Karadağ, 2018). However, most of them moved from their initial settlements to big cities, particularly to Istanbul where they formed a sizable Afghan community and engaged in lather cloth industry due to their customary work back in their homeland. These network dynamics of Afghan community in Turkey contributed to the growth of Afghan migratory movement in Turkey over 1980s and 90s. Yet, the status of “Turkish origin and culture” was not operationalized by Turkish governments as it was promised in a regularized manner; rather it was ad-hoc based implementation that has been changed according to the political conjuncture.

Since the early 2010s, there has been a considerable increase in the magnitude of Afghan movement to Turkey, and as of August 2019, Turkey hosted 170,000 registered Afghans (UNHCR, 2019). The year of 2018 witnessed a significant increase in Afghan migrants arriving to Turkey from Iran. As Turkish Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced, 61,819 Afghans arrived in Turkey between January and August 2018, compared to 45,259 that arrived in 2017 (InfoMigrants, 2018). The year of 2018 concomitantly represents a period of sharp increase in the number of deportations. 17,000 Afghans were deported while the official statement was that they returned to Afghanistan voluntarily (The New York Times, 16 June 2018). The level of coercion and misled inducement into signing “voluntary return” documents to deport is still unclear and lacks grounded investigation.

The current legal and institutional infrastructure of refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey



is based on the recent (and the first) asylum law, the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), which grants “temporary protection status” to Syrians. Those fleeing from persecution from a non-European country other than Syria – particularly Afghans who constitute the largest group - are considered “conditional refugees” who stay in Turkey temporarily until they are resettled in a third country. The LFIP additionally sets the category of “subsidiary protection” that applies to those who are not qualified for refugee or conditional refugee status but cannot be returned to a place where they are at real risk. To gain the status of conditional refugee or subsidiary protection in Turkey, Afghans need to register and process their application for international protection to be resettled in a third country.

In September 2018, the Turkish authorities transferred the responsibility for the registration and processing of asylum applications of non-Syrians from the UNHCR to Turkey’s Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM). Correspondingly, the offices of DGMM at the local level (the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management-PDMM) have become the only authority in registration and the provision of identity cards which provide access to essential services such as public health care, education, and humanitarian assistance. The rejections, delays or obstacles in registering with PDMM mean that Afghans will not obtain identity cards from Turkish authorities. This situation exposes them to the risk of arrest, detention, and deportation; and impedes their access to healthcare, work, housing, education and humanitarian assistance. As a result, the informal sector becomes their only option in which they become victims of severe exploitation.

Simultaneously, attempting to cross into the Europe becomes another option. Although border crossings dropped significantly from March 2016 onwards, the UNHCR data indicate that arrivals in Greece increased by 45% in 2018 compared to 2017. Likewise, there is a visible increase in the months of 2019 compared to the same months in 2018 (UNHCR Mediterranean Situation). Major reason behind this pattern of increase is the substantial rise in Afghan refugees who constitute the majority of border crossings from Turkey to Europe.

#### 4.2.1. ESTABLISHED NETWORKS OF COMMUNITY

The legal status is the major determinant in the production of hierarchies among the Afghan community. Oldcomers with residence permit or those who came through official procedures, represent the most privileged group. For instance, Sohrab, a 42 year-old Tajik, who came in 2013, works in a consultancy company and has a residence permit. “I rented a duplex apartment in Zeytinburnu. Around 20 Afghans stay there including my friends and other illegal ones” he notes and furthers “those who are wealthier or have residence permit rent houses for the rest and receive commission”.

Afghans with residence permit are the ones arranging the infrastructure of the networks. They are generally Uzbeks or Turkmens who have started to settle in Turkey for since 1990s. They are also founders of the Afghan associations that mostly help newcomer Uzbeks in their bureaucratic, legal, medical, and business-based necessities. However, as it will be discussed in detail in the last section, the network of Afghan associations has become a toxic and corrupted one as they exploit many people with the promise of registration in Istanbul. Since they benefit from being “Turkish origin and culture”, Uzbeks and Turkmens represent the most privileged group in Istanbul. Obtaining residence permit simultaneously brings economic and social capital for Uzbek and Turkmen Afghans. Besides owning small businesses and shops, they also accumulate money from renting the houses for young, single, undocumented Afghan men. Interestingly, this reverses their dispo-

sition back in Afghanistan where they are in minority. In contrast to their long-established legacy and majority in Afghanistan, Pashtuns find themselves less advantageous within the hierarchy in Istanbul.

Once the house is arranged, the ring of friends grows with the arrival newcomers. As Hasan, a 26-year-old single and undocumented Tajik asserts:

“ Nobody goes directly to a Turkish person asking for a job or apartment. Everyone has a friend, if not they have a friend of a friend. It is to them they ask for a job or accommodation if they are willing to come. First, they get confirmation for everything when they are in Afghanistan. Later they come here. Most would not arrive without any preparation. There are some, who sleep on the streets for days and weeks. But they are the minority. One in a thousand. ”


Ahmad, a 30-year-old Pashtun who arrived in 2013 was among those who had to stay on the street:

“ When I arrived at first, I didn't know anyone. I slept on the street for two nights. One night I stayed in Zeytinburnu Park by the sea and other night I slept on a mosque courtyard. The next day, I went to an Afghan to ask for help. He was at a bakkal [grocery store] on Zeytinburnu Boulevard; we call it muhaberat [communicator]. The Afghan was there. At first he didn't trust me but I continued to talk about myself. After he realized that I was not a bad person, he helped me. He called a friend of his. That friend had an apartment and was renting it to workers. He was not a house owner. Because he had residence permit, he was able to rent the apartment for 1000 TL and sublet it to 10, 15, and even 20 people at once. He was getting 300 TL per each resident. I accepted it and moved into that house. I then met with my flat mates. One of them was working at a construction. One day, they were looking for a worker; he took me with him, so I started to work there. ”

When Kemal arrives in 2019, similar to Ahmad, he stays in park. “A guy approached, he was Turkmen and he took me to his house and found me a job at a restaurant” he says. He also adds that this Turkmen guy received 500 TL from him in return. The quoted paragraph of Ahmad above well illustrates the mechanism in accommodation in Istanbul. People often sublet apartments to approximately 15-20 single Afghan men to save money out of commission. *Muhaberat*, as coined by the Afghans, have a key role in the arrangement of the network between new and oldcomers. The accounts of our respondents indicate that *muhaberats* generally stand at the main corners of the streets or seaside with the intention to contact with newcomers. Ali, a 22-year-old Tajik, talks about *muhaberats* as those who wait for newcomers on the seaside day and night. “If there are Afghans, they help each other” he adds.

As Ali noted, a close connection and network among the Afghan community is observable. One of our respondents from a grassroots imitative distinguishes Afghans from other migrant communities in Istanbul: “They are the ones who support each other a lot. They quickly find a job or a house for a newcomer. Contrary to other communities, they do not take a commission when they help each other”. And he furthers by noting that generally Uzbeks or Turkmens have that habit of investing and accumulating.

It is often expressed by our respondents that there is no strict division among *qawms* in Afghan



houses. Although some Uzbeks and Tajiks express their uneasiness with Pashtuns, the general pattern is the share of houses together with other ethnic/kinship groups unless it is a house full of Uzbeks. Seyfullah, a 19-year-old young man, came to Turkey in 2016 and he underlines that the reference is significant rather than the ethnicity in the acceptance of a newcomer into the house:

“My friends had an apartment, so I want there. I told people at work that I had no place to stay, so they found me one. More than 10 of us sleep in one room. We each pay 250-300 TL for rent, water, and electricity. The gas and internet cost 50 TL. For food, we collect 50 TL from each. We take turns for housework. We don't accept everyone into our apartment. We either have to know them or somebody we know should vouch for them. It does not matter which tribe they belong to. In our apartment, there is one from every tribe: Pashtun, Hazara, Tajik or Uzbek. Sometimes there are fights among tribes. Each supports the leader of their tribe and there are fights because of it. If there is a fight, we then need to kick out the one who started it. It does not matter which tribe you belong to. What is important is trust. If we trust them, anyone can stay at our apartment.”

In Mustafa's house the situation is similar with respect to multiethnic composition. But he also mentions that there are apartments where there are only people from one qawm due to their similar habits and characteristics. “If you behave well, it does not matter which qawm you belong to” he says.

Afghan families share the house together with another family. Fatima is a 27-year-old married woman and works in a tailor company. She came to Turkey with her husband and children in 2018. They are all undocumented. After underlining the strong ties among Afghans, she tells their desperate conditions within the shared house:

“After coming to Istanbul for so many days I and my husband were looking to find a house but we failed, finally there was one afghan family who stays with residency, he rent a house for us by his documents. We are 6 people in a basement which has 2 rooms only; the house is very old and has insects and worms, so many times we insecticide the house but they didn't vanish. My children got skin problems. But we have no other choice than to live here. We don't know the house owner and got the house from property office which is an Afghan man. Yes sometimes that we don't pay on time he keeps coming to our home or calling us. Then we request him to give us time. We try our best not to create problem, otherwise he can easily compline us to police and we are not legal.”

Our field research demonstrates that there is a well-connected, closed and introvert relationship among Afghans, which enable them to rapidly respond to certain necessities. They prefer to solve problems among themselves rather than asking outsiders for help. Uzbeks and Turkmens designate a diversion within this picture due to their different identity belonging and capital in Istanbul. Nonetheless, despite this chain of friendship, some of our respondents imply the existence of a hierarchy regarding the division of labor within the houses. According to these accounts, the youngest, most inexperienced, and newest ones are the most disadvantageous and open to potential exploitations. But the anecdotes do not go further than implicit hints when it comes to questions about in-house relations. Hence, the level of exploitation and/or abuse apartments resided by Afghan men was not easy to capture.

## 4.2.2. ASCETIC BODILY LABOR AS THE SOLE CAPITAL

“They have a kind of mentality that tends to gain something only through work and labor” states our respondent, a member of grassroots initiative who has a close encounter and solidarity with refugee communities in Istanbul, describing a general characteristic of Afghans. He furthers: “Afghan population is a sui generis case among other nationalities; they are not like anyone else. Maybe it is really because of their genetic codes or of geographical circumstances. There is always something, a potential energy or psychology in their bodies that keeps them up in the face of incredibly desperate conditions”.

Afghan population in Istanbul represents the largest precarious labor force, working under the hardest circumstances that need enduring manual labor. Our research indicates that they do a wide spectrum of bodily labor, ranging from construction, repair shop, manufacturing, and shepherding to transportation, car mechanic and garbage/paper collection. They constantly shift from one job to another, one place to other wherever the work is available. They get paid daily and extremely low wages at which countless exploitative treatments of bosses and job owners take advantage of the lack of punishments. Their undocumented status concomitantly means their invisible labor force in the city that is entirely left at the hands of the informal sector.

Work means everything for an Afghan. To save money, to send remittances to their families back in Afghanistan, to imagine a better life, or to stay alive, they have to work without stopping. They start to work at very early ages as soon as when they are ten or eleven. Being undocumented fills Afghans with constant fear of deportation. Feeling that fear at every moment, they try to avoid any risk of being caught by the police. This implies an invisible life without any social interaction, leisure activity or gathering outside. As one of our respondents mentions: “I do not attend any meetings or gatherings. We do not have anything to do with these activities, we work”.

The labor market in Küçükusu (situated in the Beykoz district) has become a hub for Afghans, the “Afghan bazaar” as called by our respondents since the beginning of the 2000s in Istanbul (Al-jazeera, 7 April 2016). Yenimahalle neighborhood of Küçükusu hosts a large population of Afghans whose number has constantly grown in the last decade<sup>1</sup>. Besides the main districts hosting Afghan population like Zeytinburnu and Esenyurt, other neighborhoods such as Küçükusu and Yenimahalle have become newly emerging settlements predominantly for single Afghan male workers.

In the early hours of the morning, as early as 5 am, hundreds of Afghans gather on the main street, with the hope of being hired as a daily worker by Turkish overseers. After negotiations for daily payment, which usually ranges around 100-150 TL (11-16 Euros), Turkish foremen pick them up on their vehicles and take them to construction sites, manufacturing shops, sweatshops, gardening, transportation or garbage collection.

Cafer, a 19-year-old young man, from Tajik *qawm* comes to Istanbul in 2020 and he notes: “When I first arrived at Istanbul, it was so hard to find a job. I went to Afghan bazaar with a friend of mine and there I got a daily job for the first time. The job paid 140 TL”. Asif, a 17-year-old boy from Uzbek *qawm* who came to Turkey again in 2020, shares the similar experience in his young age: “We collect money each week. We go to Afghan bazaar every day to find jobs. I spend a small portion of the money I get from those jobs and send the rest to my family. I work for 120-130 TL a day”.

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1 There is a short video about Afghans in Küçükusu: <https://vimeo.com/266646222>

The repeated accounts of Afghans in our research indicate that the only capital they have is their bodily labor, the ability to work under extremely tough conditions approximately 12-14 hours per day. As one of them states, they “do all sorts of work”, including construction, textile, shepherding, carwash, garbage collection, waitress etc. Another respondent notes that, “where the work is an Afghan is there”. Constant shift from one job to another wherever it is available increases their precarious conditions including exploitation and abuse. Kemal is a Pashtun at the age of 27, an undocumented Afghan man, who arrived Turkey in 2019:

“ We cannot call it a day until the job is done. For instance, the work takes 10 hours, you cannot say 8 hours is up, I am off. The employer then would not pay. So, you figure, work another 2 hours and get paid at least. If he pays for the extra hours, it is up to him. If he doesn't, nobody can make him. It is better than not getting paid at all. You continue to work either way. They give us the hardest work that is obvious. That is how it is. If you are not Turkish, you get the hardest jobs. Easier ones are rare. We are assigned the hardest part in a construction. Turkish workers get paid 180-200 TL a day and they get the easiest tasks. We get 150 TL at most but we work the hardest. When my finger got injured at work, I went to the doctor but he didn't treat me. I came home and wrapped it with plastic. That's how I got better. I could see the bone and there was so much blood. That scared my boss so he ran off. A Kurdish guy at work took me to the hospital. ”

Osman is a single, a 25-year-old, undocumented Pashtun Afghan who works in an internet café. In 2017, three years into his arrival, he was caught by the police and deported to Afghanistan. But he came back to Turkey again in 2018. He explains a series of jobs for which he was not paid:

“ Before departing to Afghanistan on 2017, I lived in Konya, Tekirdağ and Ankara. After staying in Istanbul for a month I went to Tekirdağ and worked for 5 months in a chicken farm, but they didn't pay my salary. Then I went to Konya, there I was working in a cow's farm and since I knew driving track I was also working on the ground as farmer. There I was getting paid but I was working from sunrise till 20-21 in the night. The working hours were much and tiring, I worked there for a year then I moved to Ankara as a friend of mine found a work in iron storage. I lived in Ankara till 2017 and came back to Istanbul again [...] I was working as a welder in construction in Istanbul, but unfortunately I was deported in the same year. ”

“Where the work is, Afghan is there” is the sentence illustrating the dense mobility of Afghans within Turkey, being constantly moving from one city to another wherever a paid job is available. Hussein's story is similar to many others; he gains 1800 TL for a month in return of 10 hours long workload. Although it has been just a year since he came to Turkey, he already lived in three cities before coming to Istanbul. “Before living in Istanbul, I was staying in Ankara, Yozgat and Eskişehir” he notes, and adds, “But most of the time I was not paid and therefore I used to change cities to find a good paid work”. Right now, he works in a factory making aluminum tea pots; and though it has been already two weeks, he still does not know how much he will get paid. “A friend of mine found this job and I trusted him and just started working without asking its salary” he commented.

Unlike undocumented Afghans, Seyfullah is under international protection and registered in the city of Izmit. Notwithstanding, his outcome is not so different from the others. He came to Turkey in 2016 from Samangan in Afghanistan when he was just 15 years old. In Ankara, he applied for



international protection at UNHCR and received Izmit-based registration. “There was no one that I know in Izmit, so I did not go there” he says and goes on to explain how fast he moves between jobs and cities at his young age:

“ I had a friend who found me a job in Denizli. When I went there, I stayed at his place. I worked as a paver for 3 months. We had agreed on 3000 a month but never got paid. 10 people worked 3 months but none of us got paid. Not even a penny. We didn't speak the language; the boss took us to a village. He told us that he would pay the next day. Then he disappeared. We never found him. Then, another friend of mine found me a job as shepherd in Afyon so I went there. The work was too hard so I worked only 20 days. There were 600 sheeps and only one shepherd. The guy didn't pay me because I didn't work a whole month. Then I went to Ankara and worked as a shepherd there as well. I got paid 1500 TL for a month this time. Then I started to work as daily construction worker in Ankara. I worked 2-3 months there and got paid 80-90 TL a day. Then I arrived Istanbul because there were no jobs in Ankara during winter. I started to work in a restaurant here. After working 6 months here and got paid 1600 TL a month, I went back to Ankara. I found a daily paid irrigation job. After that I started to work in a restaurant in Ankara for another 9 months. It was during the pandemic so there were no jobs in Ankara. So, I went to Çanakkale and worked in a hotel for 20 days. It was an 18-hour work per day and paid 1700 TL a month. I quit the job, came back to Istanbul, and have been working in a textile workshop since then. ”

Despite all these desperate conditions, Seyfullah comments that he would like to stay in Turkey permanently as long as he finds a job. “I would work until I get deported” he says and with respect to a question asking his social life and gatherings, he replies that “we do not attend any meetings, we just work”. Salih’s anecdotes evoke what Monsutti (2008) describes mobility and remittance as survival strategies. Salih does not want to move to Europe because “it is impossible to go back to Afghanistan from there” in his words; rather he wants to stay in Turkey since he “can save and send money to his family and go back and forth via clandestine journey when it is necessary”. Since he came in 2017, conformably to other stories, he lived in several cities by doing shepherding, including Balıkesir, Manisa and Yalova before he came to Istanbul. While staying in Istanbul, this time he shifts from one job to another. Salih worked in four different jobs in a year, namely construction, textile, a pound shop, and signboard sticking job. He was jobless at the time the interview was conducted, but he said he found a daily job in construction to start the day after. “My housemate found it for me” he continued while he was explaining how the friend network is the major source to find a job: “Friends find jobs to one another that is how it works. Since now, I arranged a job for 4-5 people in textile or construction. When the boss says there is a need, next day we bring our friends”.

Selim, a 24-year-old Afghan man, who entered Turkey in 2017, sells corn in the streets of Tuzla. Within these three years, he tried many jobs. As he mentioned, after he arrived, he started to work in a textile workshop in Istanbul”, but another job was available in Bursa. “Then I went to Bursa with a friend of mine and worked in a factory” he notes. But that did not take long as well. “After Bursa, I went to Gebze to work in a construction” he says and explains how he spent years until he got his current corn stall. “We get out of the apartment before 9 am and come back midnight; so, we have no business in the neighborhood” notes Selim while he was describing how they live in an invisible way without any social life. It seems that their main social activity is playing cricket usually once or twice a month. “Going to seaside and playing cricket” well describes the scope of their social life when the work is over and there are less people around.



Figure 7: Afghans playing cricket. [Photo: Emirkan Cörüt] Courtesy of Emirkan Cörüt, the author is thankful for his generous sharing.

As previously mentioned, the sole motivation and capital of the Afghan community in Turkey is their manual labor, which determines where they are and what they do. Thus, registration often stands as an obstacle in front of their mobility determined by the availability of work. Even if they manage to be registered in a satellite city, since there are not enough jobs there, the trajectory of their story converges with undocumented Afghans. Behram, a 20-year-old Afghan, who arrived Turkey in 2020, comments that not himself but his friends in Ankara were registered and assigned to other cities. “But they did not go because there were no jobs in small cities, so they still work in Ankara” he tells and notes that “registration has no advantages” to find a job, “we stay wherever there is a work”. When it is asked whether he receives any aid from a stakeholder or an association, he responds as “we did not receive any aid, we do not go anywhere for aid, we work”.

#### 4.2.2.1. DIFFERENTIATION IN AFGHAN LABOR FORCE

In our fieldwork, we aimed to examine the potentially differentiated privileges in the labor force among the Afghan community in Istanbul. The results demonstrate that there are three major aspects, which are in conjunction with one another, that influence the sector and position of work: the length of stay, background of *qawm*, and Turkish language. Those who arrived in the 1990s have mostly become store owners. The majority runs grocery stores or is in real estate business. For instance, in Küçükusu, where the “Afghan bazaar” is located, such division of labor exists. It is common that the early comers, for instance, own small shops, hairdressers, bakeries, and restau-

rants. However, as a member of a grassroots initiative asserts, these constitute only the 10-20% of the total Afghan community in Istanbul while the rest is picked up for daily work every day to do hard manual labor scattered across the city.


The duration in Istanbul is highly related to the *qawm*-based background and level of proficiency in Turkish language. Oldcomers are largely composed of Uzbek and Turkmen Afghans, most of whom have their residence permit or even Turkish citizenship. They are concomitantly the founders of many Afghan associations established on the basis of “Turkish origin and culture” in Istanbul with close ties to Turkish authorities. With respect to Uzbek and Turkmen communities in Istanbul, the member of the grassroots initiative expresses how pecuniary relations have become predominant in the Uzbek associations in the arrangement of residence permits: “These Uzbek people are the ones already gained legal status and residence permit since they came much earlier to Turkey. Thus, they have second or even third generation now, acquiring already established business sector. Unlike other Afghans, they have a vigilant mentality in pecuniary affairs, frequently exploitation I would say, that depends on abuse of newcomer Afghans”.

One of our respondents, Merve, a 31-year-old pre-school teacher in Istanbul is among those who have Turkish citizenship. Her family settled in Turkey in 1994 and as a member of the second generation, she graduated from the university. In addition to the early comers, she explains how Uzbek newcomers in Zeytinburnu are placed within the labor market:

“ They are mostly at the textile industry because leather jobs are most gone. They are made work very hard with no insurance. It doesn't matter the state doesn't permit refugees to work or have anyone work without insurance. Most Afghans work in the textile industry. In the last couple of years, there are many who work in restaurants, bakeries. Here in Zeytinburnu, there are a lot of Afghan bakeries. I bought bread from one of them the other day. When a relative of ours came here, my mother placed him in a bakery. He worked there five years and now he is a chief. Then he left his place to his brother, went back to Afghanistan and opened a small bakery there. There are no simits in Afghanistan so he makes simits and sell them over there. ”

Even the newcomer Uzbeks and Turkmens are relatively more privileged due to language advantage. Because their languages are similar to Turkish, they learn Turkish fairly faster and therefore have greater opportunity to find jobs with better pay and conditions compared to other Afghans. Belonging to Pashtun *qawm*, Kemal asserts that “there are many Uzbeks in Istanbul. Some arrived 25-30 years ago and settled here. Their jobs are easier, that is why they do not suffer that much. Besides, they learn Turkish easier because their language is similar, and it helps a lot”.

While Uzbeks and Turkmens have the competitive advantage in the labor market, there is no significant hierarchy observed in our fieldwork regarding the *qawm*-based differentiation. The members of other *qawms*, including Pashtuns, Tajiks, and Hazaras are dispersed among different sectors. Nonetheless, it is possible to observe a pattern with respect to the Pashtun community, which as the majority and most privileged section in Afghanistan, becomes the least advantageous group in Istanbul. Several times, our respondents touch upon this nuance. Hasan, from Tajik *qawm* points out that:



“ *Most Uzbeks work in markets or restaurants. Pashtuns usually do çekçek [recyclable garbage collection] on streets. They do the messiest jobs. By messiest, I mean the hardest work. We cannot do it. Why? Because we want to remain clean so we cannot. Tajiks, for instance, most of them are in textile. I know each group because I lived with many Afghan qawms a long time.* ”

For Afghans, the work of garbage/paper collection is situated at the bottom of job hierarchy. They call it “çekçek”. Çekçek means rickshaw, which they use in Afghanistan and especially during their journey on the way to Pakistani border from Nimruz. Since garbage collecting vehicles look similar to three-wheeled rickshaws, they call the job itself as “çekçek”. The newcomers who do not know anyone in Istanbul commonly start from the bottom and start with the job of çekçek. According to Kemal, “that is the hardest work”, but after a while “you go up the stairs and find easier and better paid jobs”.

Our fieldwork indicates that the majority of Afghans, leaving aside the early Afghan habitants (mostly Uzbeks and Turkmens), constitute a considerable manual labor force crosscutting different informal sectors in Istanbul. Under incredibly precarious conditions, they constantly move between jobs and cities within very short periods of time. Their bodily and ascetic labor symbolizes their one and only capital with the motivation of saving and remittance. As our respondent from a grassroots initiative well describes: “Afghans represent an exceptional community who do not acquire a mentality of business, trade or entrepreneurship while it is the case for many refugees in Istanbul. Rather they have a mentality to earn only through their manual labor”. That is the reason why İshak, a 19-year-old Afghan, notes that “Turkish people say that Afghans are hard-working people unlike Pakistanis or Syrians”.

A recurring theme in our field research is Afghans’ resilience and tolerance towards incredibly harsh conditions combined with their inability to access health services. In his very young age, 17 years old, Asif tells that “I have no health-related problems work-wise; work here is not so hard. You should have seen us what kinds of work we have done before”. His description portrays the level of misery Afghans have experienced all throughout their lives. However, it was quite observable that the responses of Afghans signal their combatant and strong body excessively tolerant to cruel conditions. From the moment they were born, they get used to very devastating circumstances both in their home country and everywhere they move.

“We are Afghans and nobody has helped Afghans till this day” says Cafer in his 19 years old. “We have a close contact with every migrant group in Istanbul; many of them justifiably complain about numerous things and ask for help, except Afghans. We have never seen an Afghan asking for help” articulates our respondent in a grassroots initiative while he depicts the unique character of Afghans resilient to any kind of conditions.

### 4.3. MOBILITY-SECURITY NEXUS AS A POLITICS OF DETERRENCE

“Between the years of 2017-2019, approximately 92,000 Afghans were deported from Turkey to Afghanistan” states one of our respondents, a member of an Afghan association and a human rights activist. “There is charter flights twice a week sending Afghans directly back to Afghanistan” she adds. In 2018, at the time of Afghan arrivals dramatically increased in Turkey, The Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced in April that the numbers of Afghans intercepted within first four months




Figure 8: A garbage collector Afghan. They call it as çekçek referring to rickshaw they use while crossing Afghanistan border. [Photo: Emirkan Cörüüt] Courtesy of Emirkan Cörüüt, the author is thankful for his generous sharing.

of the year was 29,899 while it was 45,259 for the whole year of 2017 (BBC Türkçe, 25 April 2018). For official records, out of 29,899 intercepted Afghans, 10% was deported. In 2019, approximately 200,000 Afghans got caught according to official numbers, as the MoI declared more than one third of those Afghans were deported (Anadolu Ajansı, 22 October 2019).

In Istanbul, there are three removal centers located in Selimpaşa, Binkılıç, and Tuzla. In addition to these, the foreign branch of the police in Pendik works as a removal center. When a person gets intercepted by the police on the street, they are taken to these removal centers. The DGMM makes the decision whether deportation shall be issued within the scope of paragraph one of Article 54 of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection. In addition to the removal decision, the governorate shall issue an administrative detention decision for those whom removal decision have been issued; and this duration shall not exceed six months. However, in the cases of “failure of cooperation or providing correct information or documents”, this period may be extended for additional six months. In practice, since the majority of Afghans in Istanbul are undocumented and unregistered, a responsible person from Afghanistan consulate waits for the process of official documentation. In collaboration with the DGMM, they approve the identity of that particular person to be issued with a removal decision. “The process goes so smoothly with Afghanistan; they quickly finalize the identification process and issue international travel document to be deported” mentions our respondent from a NGO and furthers that “Afghanistan is a country that work closely with Turkey in deportation processes”.

Afghans in Istanbul are generally taken to the removal center in Tuzla. As our respondent, NGO representative providing legal aid, points out “Tuzla has always hosted single, young Afghan population”, and she adds that “Tuzla is a center which is generally used as a transfer center. People



are transferred to other centers or cities from there”. Our respondents from NGOs most frequently refer to the unpredictability of removal decisions, which involve considerable inconsistencies among different cases: “it is impossible here to say that this is the rule and the practice is done accordingly”.

In our fieldwork, we seek to examine the implementation process of the interception and deportation decisions at which we ask particular questions regarding their experiences during the encounter with the police on the street or stay in removal centers.

The fear of deportation is the major concern for Afghans in Istanbul. Since the majority is undocumented or not registered to Istanbul, the potential encounter with the police is a nightmare for an Afghan. Reşat, a 28-year-old Afghan man describes the hopeless conditions of being undocumented:

“ Here is the difficulty: I can't go anywhere, police pull over, make us wait, question us. Aside from that we want work to be in order. After all, we have no insurance, so when we go to the hospital, we come across problems. First, they don't accept us to hospitals, and even if they do, we don't have insurance. It costs us a lot because they charge us more. I can't get a telephone line so I constantly ask someone who can help me. Even then the line dies two months later. The same thing all over again. I also want to rent an apartment but nobody wants me. They don't give us medicine when we go to pharmacy. To make long story short, we face a lot of problems. I do not go out because my fear. I always try to be careful, meaning I do not go out. I know what will happen to me if I go on a holiday. ”

The fear of deportation shapes all daily practices of Afghans and culminates in invisible lives. All undocumented respondents describe how they minimize their involvement to city life as much as possible. Nonetheless, considering the fact that they are simultaneously quite mobile in the labor market, it is very likely for police to stop them during their commute.

The high mobility of the Afghan workforce illustrates the tension between politics of condonation and securitization. While there has been considerable amount of mass deportation of Afghans especially since 2017, the high numbers of undocumented and informal Afghan works are visible in the city. Considering this fact, we aim to capture the *modus operandi* behind the practices of deportation in daily life. Respectively, we ask our Afghan respondents to voice their encounter experiences with the police in Istanbul.

The accounts indicate that the highly mobile labor force of Afghans is tolerated by the Turkish state unless a security concern arises. The accounts of our respondents clearly demonstrate a balance between the politics of condonation and of securitization, which we call “mobility-security nexus”, shaping the governance of deportation decisions of Afghan population in Istanbul. Asif, a 17-year-old boy, who arrived just six months ago, already encountered with police control:

“ Only once I was pulled aside for kimlik [ID] check since I arrived. The police threatened me to send back to Afghanistan. I told him there is a war there. He was speaking Turkish and I was in Uzbek. After a while he let me go. Yes, there are cases of deportation. It depends on the person. If you explain yourself, some police officers would let you go. But if you are in bad luck and run into a bad cop, you would get deported. ”

Behram has a similar experience when the police stop him and ask for his ID, in return he gives a fake one prepared by smugglers, and the police “tore it off and threw in the garbage”. Then, Behram tries to explain his situation referring to the ongoing war and conflict in Afghanistan. “I tried to explain myself in Uzbek and they let me go” he notes. According to Berat, a 26-year-old Afghan man, your impression in the eyes of police officers is pivotal in determining their decision:


“It happened to me only once and the police had known me from earlier. They asked for an ID or passport. I told them I left it in the restaurant [he works in a kebab shop] but they told me that wasn’t true. “This time I let you go” said one of the police officers, “but don’t let that happen again.” If I was stopped somewhere else, I would have probably be taken away. Yes, deportations happen in ID control. Some dressed improperly so the police held them. Those who act at odds with laws, the police deport them. If you act humbly, they let you go. When I am questioned, I explain myself calmly and rationally. I tell them where I work, my boss’s phone number etc. If I behave well, they don’t do anything. But if we run and hide, police would be suspicious and might think that we are smugglers or drug traffickers. We shouldn’t act like that.”

The feature that Asif, Behram, and Berat have in common is their belonging to Uzbek qawm and ability to communicate in Turkish. Though the risk is higher for the members of other qawms, the accounts signalize a general practice of toleration covering all Afghans unless there is a security-related or political issue. Faysal, for instance, is a Pashtun, who arrived Turkey in 2019. He works in a restaurant. And he claims, despite the regular visits by state officials and police officers to the restaurant, nobody has asked for ID of the Afghans working there until now. Ahmad, a 30-year-old Pashtun man, portrays the balance within the mobility-security nexus:

“Police controls happen all the time but they don’t have a pattern. They are mostly in crowded places like metro stations and such. I can’t do anything when it happens to me because I have no kimlik. They tell me to register and threaten to deport me if I don’t. If you behave well and mind your own business, the police wouldn’t hold you up even if you’re unregistered. Yes, deportations happen but to those who thief, fight, and violate the rules. Not everyone is deported. If all the undocumented people get deported, there wouldn’t be any Afghans left in Turkey. I haven’t been deported but two people I know had stolen a cell phone. The police caught them and deported them.”

What Ahmad refers as the “violation of rules” contains a flexible terrain in the implementation. It is frequently mentioned by our interlocutors that innocence in front of a judge would not protect them from becoming a scapegoat at any time. Thus, Afghans tend to stay away from any encounter that might cause them trouble. The quoted paragraph below belongs to Seyfullah, a 19-year-old Uzbek man, who is registered in Izmit but has lived in several different cities before ending up in Istanbul:

“Yes, ID checks happen [...] I ran into them 5 or 6 times. They told me I have to get an ID and I need to apply for it. The police stopped me in Denizli once when a guy stole my phone. I ran after him. The people around called the police so when they came, they held both of us, me and the thief. The thief was Turkish. They asked for my ID and



*I said I had none. They told me I was going to get deported. A lady lawyer came and helped me. They let me go a week later. After 6 months, they called me to say my phone was found and that I should pick it up. I was in Ankara then. So he said that I could either pick it up or spare it. I was working and also afraid, so I spared the phone. ”*

Seyfullah’s story well portrays the danger for Afghans to be around or even victim of any suspicious situation. As Ali, a 22-year-old Tajik man expresses, they abstain from giving witness accounts even though the incident has nothing to do with Afghans but solely with Turkish people. “We keep away from this kind of incidents and walk away from the scene in case we would get in trouble” he asserts. Even a single quarrel, no matter how insignificant, among Afghans, might cause deportation of the entire group. At the time Osman, a 25-year-old Pashtun man, works in Ankara together with 25 other Afghans, a fight occurs among them and his uncle gets stabbed. The police arrive and take the whole group to the removal center without any explanation. Not only they get deported back to Afghanistan, they also cannot get their salary from the employer, who owes them 45,000 TL for 25 people in total.

Our field research points out that the year of 2019 is a breaking point with respect to the frequency of checkpoints in Istanbul. Following the press statement made by the governor of Istanbul in July 2019, the securitized politics that takes the form of restricting the mobility of unregistered Syrians as well as undocumented ones became widespread in Istanbul. Our respondents often underline this policy change at that time. Reşat, a 28-year-old Uzbek man, who lives in Turkey since 2014, describes the increase in the number of deportations during that period:

“Of course, it increased a lot [in 2019 summer]. Many of my friends and acquaintances were deported. During that time, my house was very close to where I worked. 5 minutes walking distance. Apart from work, I never went out. And definitely not out of my district. I didn’t get in cars or buses. I just went to work and came back home. My friends, on the other hand, got around so they got caught. The police caught them at work. They also came to where I work but we got out, ran away, and hide. We experienced all these. ”

Mustafa, a 23-year-old Tajik man, runs into a police control in the summer of 2019. He says that he is undocumented, the police want to check his phone and social media accounts. “I was released, but three people from my apartment have been deported” he notes, and comments that “the increased controls in the 2019 summer were kept tight for couple of months and were withdrawn”. However, Hasan is not as lucky as the others. His story is significant in terms of depicting the extent of human rights violations occurring in the removal centers as well as the conditions in which people are transferred from one center to another:

“I was walking on the street [in December 2019] and a vehicle that looks like a school shuttle stopped in front of me. “Please your ID, gentleman” a man said. I said I had no ID but passport. He didn’t even look at the passport. They put me inside the bus right away. I stayed the whole night at the police station. They didn’t give any food or let me go to toilet. I am content with Turkish state but not some of its people. Sometimes the police don’t respect you at all. They treated me like animal there. Then they took me to Tuzla Removal Center. We weren’t given any food there, it was airless. We even propose them to pay for our own food. They didn’t accept it either. Then they took me to Mersin. It was the best among them. They treated us with respect there. Because I speak Turkish and



*English, I worked as a translator there. Then they sent me back to Tuzla. There I stayed 3 months. They beat me so bad that my mouth, lips and ribs got injured. They wanted us to sign a document and they beat us if we didn't. I told them I didn't want to leave Turkey no matter what. Then they realized that they needed a translator because there were all kinds of people there like Africans, Iranians, and Azerbaijanis etc. Then they needed a welder, an electrician, a plumber... I was all those things. Then the head officer there noticed me and told other cops not to disrespect me. Then they took me to Adana Göç İdaresi. First they were nice but then they treated us as if we were terrorists. They beat us. They smoked right in front of us knowing that we wanted to smoke but cannot. They didn't beat me but they beat a friend of mine when he asked for water. We couldn't go to toilet when we needed it. And when they took us to toilet, they showed us the dogs outside and told us those were better than us. At least they are good for something, they said. Then we passed 15 days in Adana. I was working in an Arzum store back then the lawyer of the place came and had me released. ”*

The long journey of Hasan does not end there; that after his release, the officer in Adana asks whether he would like to go to Istanbul or Greece. After three months of his detention in several centers and cities, his release coincides with the Edirne events at the Greek-Turkish land border in March 2020. Right after the announcement of Turkish authorities declaring the opening of borders with Greece, Hasan is asked if he would like to directly go from the removal center in Adana to the land border in the city of Edirne. Hasan responds positively and he is boarded on a bus arranged by the authorities that takes him to the Pazarkule border gate where thousands of people gathered to cross into Greece.

#### **4.3.1. ABANDONED BY INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION**

“Registering is an endless process. First you go to Ankara; there they appoint you in small cities, where you cannot find a job. When you cannot find a job, you have to go to Istanbul or Ankara. When you go to these cities, your ID gets canceled. Therefore, it is better not to register” says Ahmad, a 30-year-old Pashtun man, living undocumented in Turkey since 2013. His description briefly summarizes the structural obstacles in legal protection that produces systematic illegalization of Afghans in Istanbul (De Genova, 2002; Calavita and Kitty, 2005).

Non-Syrians that seek international protection are required to register officially after their entrance to Turkey. They are usually assigned to “satellite cities” in which they must stay and sign documents in person on regular basis. They wait in these satellite cities till they are called for an interview for the refugee status determination. As of September 2018, in the wake of drastic increase in Afghan arrivals, the UNHCR handed over the determination procedures to the DGMM, which then became the sole authority.

If a person under international protection is granted with “conditional refugee status”, then she can access to basic protection services until she is resettled in a third country. However, Istanbul is not a satellite city, so there is no registration process for international protection available for this city. In the best scenario, Afghans are appointed to small satellite cities to be registered until they are called for an interview determining refugee status to be resettled. As indicated in our field research, the outcome does not go compatible with the on-paper principles. Already closed satellite cities, collective rejection of applications, and indeterminate process of resettlements in a third country are the indicators of a *politics of deterrence* that depicts the current protection regime in



Turkey for Afghans.

The phenomenon of “undocumented, single, young Afghan men” symbolizes a total abandonment by the international protection. As a member of an Afghan association notes in our interviews, the workload and professional incapacity have led to numerous malfunctions since the procedures have been entirely moved from the UNHCR to the DGMM. First and foremost, by the end of 2017, the DGMM decided not to take any registration from “single men”. “It has been already approximately three years that single Afghan men have not been considered for registration” expresses our interlocutor.

What we call the politics of deterrence is relevant regarding the statistics of international protection granted in the last couple of years. Based on the statistics in *Turkey 2020 Report* of European Commission, Turkey granted international protection to 5,449 applicants in 2019 while this number was 72,961 in 2018 (European Commission, 2020). It is stated in the Report that authorities rejected 5,212 applicants in 2019 compared with 13,942 in 2018.

According to the statistics of the DGMM, the number of international protection applications falls dramatically by 2019. While there are 112,415 applicants in 2017 and 114,537 in 2018; it drops to 56,417 in 2019 (DGMM International Protection Statistics). Regarding this decrease in 2019, the statement of governor of Istanbul in July 2019 is influential as it heralds the proliferation of police controls and deportations. Although policies of collective deportation have been relinquished, the institutional obstacles in legal access that aim deterrence are observable in our field research.

Although the “single Afghan man” constitutes the major category subjected to lack of international protection, our fieldwork displays that similar experiences regarding the inaccessibility of legal protection shared by Afghan families. Kemal, a 27-year-old married Pashtun man, who entered Turkey in 2019, explains why he has not pursued application for international protection:

“ You can't get anything with the card so it's futile to apply for it. On top of it, the process takes 2.5-3 years and for nothing. They don't send anyone to Europe. They just give an almost blank paper with your name and last name on it. 6 months later they just renew that paper. It is the same paper with a different date. They tell you to come and pick up the new one when the date arrives. So it's a waste of time. That's why we don't apply for it. It doesn't make any difference whether you have applied or not when the police stop you. ”

Zübeyir is married and entered into Turkey together with his wife and two children in 2019. They live in a 2+1 apartment along with another Afghan family, nine people in total, in Zeytinburnu:

“ As soon as we arrived in Trabzon we immediately went to the immigration office, but they refused to register us under the International Protection. We were told the registration in Trabzon was temporarily closed and we need to go to another city to get registered. I then went to ASAM to get help from them they said its above their ability. Rather than these I did not know any migrant support center to get help from. I requested the immigration office just to give kimliks [IDs] to my children to take them to the hospital still they didn't accept. After we lost our hope from Trabzon I moved to Samsun, there I was working as tailor and I was receiving 1600-1700 TL per month which was very little, we spent five to six months there, the sosyal [referring to state authorities] was not helping us. The

*employer was not paying me on time or he was paying less, so I thought to move to Istanbul. During our stay in Samsun, I tried to get ID from Samsun immigration office but I failed again. ”*

Our interlocutors agree on that the registration process for international protection has become considerably difficult in satellite cities as Afghans are sent from one city to another due to temporary closures of registration in a particular province. They must either wait for an indeterminate period or move to another city referred by state to try again. Among our interlocutors, the ones, who arrived before 2018 and attempted to access to legal protection, there are positive cases accomplish at least the registration step. Selim entered Turkey in 2017. “At that time, it was easier” he underlines and tells that he applied for registration to the UNHCR in Ankara and obtained a document issued in Kayseri. When he goes to Kayseri, an appointment is given for two months later. By referring to the transfer of procedures, he notes that “it was the time when the UNHCR was closed, and thus my process became null.”


Indeterminate circulation between cities for legal access manifests the *politics of deterrence* in reaching legal access that tacitly reproduces illegalized Afghan population. In addition to the institutional and bureaucratic obstacles in legal protection, dispersion to satellite cities is not the best scenario for the Afghan population due to lack of employment in those small cities; and thereby they have to move to Istanbul to find a job. Early arrivals in the pre-2018 period, despite their success in registration in particular satellite cities, need to move to Istanbul due to insufficient jobs and inadequate payments. At the end of the day, the outcome of living in Istanbul without registration corresponds to being neglected by the umbrella of international protection.

Undocumented/unregistered life in Istanbul refers to a total desolateness without any access to medical care, official travel, bank account, phone number, rental contract or any kind of service that are necessary in daily life. Kemal, who is an undocumented Pashtun, explains the level of their despair:

**“** *My finger was cut during construction work so I went to hospital. The doctor there didn't want to treat me and said “I don't want to betray my country.” I told him, don't betray your country then, just do something altruistic. He didn't so I stayed home and couldn't work for 2,5 months. It is good that God protects us from illness. If we get sick, we wouldn't be able to get by. If you live here undocumented, you cannot get your money. We are paid much less than other workers. Besides, we have no insurance. Even if you go to police, the first thing they ask is to show your ID. That's why we cannot even go to police. ”*

Seyfullah experiences a similar story at a very young age, when he was 19 years old:

**“** *While working in Denizli, my hand was broken. The boss didn't help at all so I couldn't go to doctor. I treated myself, put egg to it but it didn't get better. After 2 months, I went to a private hospital, got treated and charged 700 TL. Once, my hand broke, then I got itches all over my body, and later my foot was pierced by nail. I got treated in private hospitals and had to pay for them. Nobody helps us, so we take care of ourselves when we get sick. ”*



Those who can afford go either to private hospitals or clandestine clinics. But the most common solution in the case of severe incidents or health problems is taking medicine from pharmacies without doctor treatment or prescription. While Fatima tells her story regarding the lack of medical care, it becomes clear that it is the women, whose experiences are the hardest:

“ *We don't have health insurance, so when we go to the state hospitals they don't accept us. We only can get treatments in private hospitals which very costly. When I learned about my pregnancy I went for checkup and it cost me 600 lira, after that I could never visit doctor. I also have kidney problem, I think it is infected, the whole night it pains. I cannot go to the private hospital because I know it will cost a lot. My daughter has a node on her foot finger and she can't wear shoe it needs to be operated but we cannot do it. I heard for giving birth the hospitals charge 4000- 5000 TL, I'm really worried how we are going to pay it.* ”

In the lack of international protection and civil society aid, the gap is filled by Afghan associations. As the anecdotes of our respondents show, there is a high level of corruption in those associations where they collect money from the people with the promise of providing them with residence permit or other benefits. Osman is a 25-year-old Pashtun Afghan and he shares his experience with one of the Afghan associations in Istanbul:

“ *I heard there is one association of Uzbeks in Istanbul, and they help the people to get residency from Turkey. When I went there they indirectly told me that either my father or mother should be Uzbek so that they can register for residency, I was not fulfilling their conditions so I never went again. You may know better the Turkish people now call the Uzbeks as brother because they speak their language; I guess this is why the government gives them this right.* ”

Many believe that majority of Afghan associations only helps Uzbeks and Turkmens. The other qawms are not welcomed:

“ *I wanted to get registered but I didn't speak the language back then. My friends told me about an association that takes money but one doesn't usually get ID in return. They said the association gets 300 TL for registration, get our names, fill the registration form based on our ethnicity as if we were Uzbek or Turkmen, and tell that is how we would get residence permit. My friends said all of these, so I didn't register. An Uzbek friend of mine applied to an Uzbek association and he got a permit.* ”

Merve, who is an oldcomer Uzbek back in 1990s having a Turkish citizenship, complains about Afghan associations due to the high level of corruption. “Among both presidents of associations and the members of Afghan consulate, there are many bribe-takers” notes Merve, and continues “Despite the fact that people spend their months and years to have a permit, some just acquire the permit a day after they arrive, that's why the associations were established”. Another respondent agrees with Merve by uttering that “Uzbeks have contacts and they can get it done either by paying or knowing someone from inside. They do not treat us well, so neither I nor my friends have applied. But some Uzbek friends who applied got admitted”.



All these anecdotes reveal the exploitative and discriminatory mechanism generated by the lack of structural protection for Afghans. The primary outcome of the lack of legal and medical protection is the Afghan population's constant precarity in all areas of life. As Zübeyir nicely puts, "you do not have any right when you are unregistered, you are nothing else than a prisoner". Halim has experienced both lives, registered, and unregistered, since he had to go back to Afghanistan after he was registered in Sivas. Let us finish with his words: "Life is so beautiful when you are registered".

# 5. CONCLUSION

Afghans, being the longest-displaced and longest-dispossessed population in the world, have not yet received the attention they deserve from the international community. While what can be called the Afghan fatigue grows in the international audience, violence not only maintains and yet increases in the country. The case of Afghans reveals the problems with the international asylum regime that has been generated in the post-WWII period. This longest-displaced population calls forth reconsideration in the very definition of a refugee in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Fleeing from war, violence, mass killings, natural disasters, drought and floods, and extreme poverty, Afghans are still not taken into consideration in collective asylum cases. In today's world, the constructed categorical differentiation between an "economic migrant" and a "political asylum" is now proven to be obsolete and insufficient as it lays the ground for the material, institutional and ideological infrastructure of the long durée of precarity for Afghans.

By putting the city of Istanbul on the spotlight, this study draws attention to a wider international infrastructure that constantly proliferates exploitative (pre)conditions for the Afghan population. The precarity of the Afghan population starts at their home country and moves with Afghan bodies across countries and regions. Forced displacement due to numerous natural, economic and political factors is followed by weeks-long dangerous journey during which they cross deadly mountains and deserts. The ones who survive this journey reach the Turkish border after which their predicament ensues in the hands of cruel market conditions. Indicating the unique characteristics of the city of Istanbul, the young, single, and undocumented Afghans constitute the bottom stratum within the informal labor force. Working under extremely cruel conditions, living a totally isolated and invisible life, earning money to remit back home to support their families as their resilient body allows them, and being completely abandoned by the international community and civil society, the Afghan population stands at the margins of precarity. Their bodily labor becomes the one and only capital they have. While the heaviest working conditions turn them into docile bodies, the legal precarity intimidates them with all-pervasive fear of deportation. Accordingly, they become subjected to extremely self-enclosed and invisible life within the hidden corners of Istanbul.

In addition to the invisibility enforced by their living conditions, Afghans are also invisible in the eyes of international community and civil society. Due to the structural, institutional and bureaucratic barriers in front of registration and access to international protection, Afghans in Istanbul are left with only one choice that is undocumented life. It concomitantly means being neglected by the scope of civil society whose aid or assistance becomes inaccessible. At this point, several grassroots initiatives fill this gap, albeit partially, by reaching out to these invisible lives despite their restricted budgets. On the other hand, Afghan associations utilize this lacuna by marketizing and monetizing the registration process. All in all, besides some who capitalize on these precarious lives, the predicament of the majority increases. Within their highly isolated and stranded life, Afghans pursue practices of solidarity among themselves in Turkey and with the ones in Afghanistan by establishing long-distance networks ties.

Lastly, the tragedy of Afghans is still far away from being acknowledged despite its four decades long history. In December 2020, senior humanitarian affairs official of the UN announced

right after his trip to Afghanistan that 16 million Afghans would need help in 2021 due to pandemic, increased conflict, and massive displacement. These indicate that the story of Afghans will continue and even intensify in the near future unless the international community takes the responsibility of providing legal and structural pathways.



# 6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

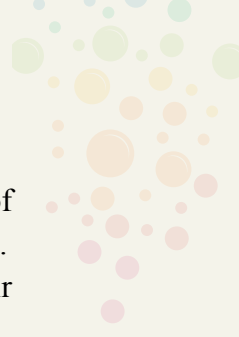
## FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Address the long-standing root causes of forced displacement with the aim of establishing sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan, of focusing on sustainable development goals targeting gender equality, decent work, and elimination of all kinds of discrimination and inequalities.
- The deficiencies of the current political asylum system should be revisited to eradicate the obsolete and insufficiently constructed categories between the “economic migrants” and “refugees”.
- Monitor the circumstances of all Afghans regardless of status in all three countries of transit and destination, namely Pakistan, Iran and Turkey.
- Follow the refugee status determination process in mentioned three countries.
- All countries along the journeys of Afghan population, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey, should be supported financially and technically in their efforts to protect the rights of Afghan population.
- Revisit the “vulnerability criteria” with regard to Afghan population, in which not only women, elderly and children, but also single young men can be deprived of rights, support and aid.
- Provide infrastructure for international and national civil society functioning to alleviate the precarious conditions of Afghans, with regard to access to protection, basic needs, health, accommodation, education and employment.
- The European Union should be invited to revisit its funding schemes in order to pay regard to Afghans.
- International donors should consider non-Syrian populations and be further flexible in terms of funding allocation specifically in times of crisis.

## FOR THE AUTHORITIES IN TURKEY

- Reassess and thereby invigorate the visa application process of Afghans who wish to come to Turkey via legal pathways; and pave the way for regular migration.
- To encourage regular migration, temporary labor agreements or other circular migration schemes should be employed.
- Prioritize elimination of barriers in asylum application procedures by strengthening institutional capacity and collaboration with civil society and international actors providing legal aid.





- Rights and needs of all people should be protected; and the international principle of non-refoulement for migrant and refugee communities should be upheld in all conditions.
- The freedom of movement of migrants and refugees should be enlarged by permitting their mobility to work and travel outside of the registered provinces.
- Consider the diversity within Afghan population in terms of skills and work experience, and generate circumstances easing access to work permit.
- Guarantee safe working conditions, minimum standards of working time and provisions of minimum wage for Afghan population.
- Due to the vast majority of undocumented persons in Istanbul, the registrations should be opened.
- Considering the significant but invisible contribution of Afghan labor to Turkish economy, positive interventions should be pursued to ameliorate the precarious work conditions in the labor market.
- Considering the notion of *hemşehri* (being inhabitants of a city), both Istanbul Metropolitan and district municipalities should act on the obstacles of Afghans, providing them services and access to social aid provisions.
- Given the lessons learned with COVID-19 pandemic in terms of public health, and the relevant provisions in the Constitution of Turkey, provide health services to everyone regardless of legal status, nationality, ethnicity, age, gender, etc., taking into consideration especially the work-related accidents.
- Provide measures to abolish exploitation of Afghans by the private sector in addition to certain associations serving the community.

## FOR THE CIVIL SOCIETY

- Guarantee inclusion of non-Syrian populations into aid plans and programs.
- Provide legal, medical and social aid to all Afghans regardless of legal status and registration.
- Expanded notion of “vulnerability criteria” should be attained and employed.
- Collaboration with grassroots initiatives supporting Afghans with better access to the field is required.
- In spite of priorities set by international donors, an active, flexible and responsive position is essential during crisis situations, by addressing human rights and needs in time.
- Act on to eliminate discrimination, cultural misperceptions and racism by addressing multicultural, egalitarian and inclusive discourse actualized through certain activities and programs.

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# APPENDIX

## LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

	Age	Gender	Qawm	Marital status	Legal status	Year of arrival
1	27	Male	Uzbek	Married	Undocumented	2015
2	28	Male	Uzbek	Engaged	Undocumented	2014
3	28	Male	Uzbek	Married	Undocumented	2017
4	26	Male	Uzbek	Married	IP in different city	2018
5	26	Male	Tajik	Single	Undocumented	2016
6	31	Female	Uzbek	Single	Turkish citizen	1994
7	28	Female	Turkmen	Married	Residence permit	2017
8	27	Male	Pashtun	Married	Undocumented	2019
9	19	Male	Pashtun	Single	Undocumented	2019
10	20	Male	Pashtun	Single	Undocumented	2019
11	24	Male	NA	Single	IP in different city	2016
12	24	Male	Hazara	Single	Expired registration	2018
13	23	Male	Pashtun	Single	Undocumented	2019
14	25	Male	Tajik	Single	IP in different city	2017
15	30	Male	Tajik	Married	Residence permit	2019
16	25	Male	Pashtun	Single	Undocumented	2014
17	42	Male	Uzbek	Married	Undocumented	2018
18	27	Female	Tajik	Married	Undocumented	2018
19	17	Male	Tajik	Single	IP in different city	2019
20	34	Male	Turkmen	Married	Undocumented	2019
21	32	Female	Turkmen	Married	Turkish citizen	2012
22	30	Female	Uzbek	Single	Residence permit	2012
23	NA	Male	Turkmen	Single	Undocumented	2017
24	33	Male	Turkmen	Married	Undocumented	2016
25	22	Male	Pashtun	Married	Undocumented	2015
26	22	Male	Tajik	Single	Undocumented	2020
27	23	Male	Tajik	Single	Undocumented	2019
28	28	Male	Uzbek	Engaged	IP in different city	2017
29	19	Male	Uzbek	Single	IP in different city	2016
30	25	Male	Uzbek	Single	Undocumented	2016
31	30	Male	Pashtun	Married	Undocumented	2013
32	24	Male	Pashtun	Single	Undocumented	2017
33	30	Male	Tajik	Married	Undocumented	2015
34	20	Male	Uzbek	Single	Undocumented	2020
35	20	Male	Uzbek	Single	Undocumented	2020



	Age	Gender	Qawm	Marital status	Legal status	Year of arrival
36	17	Male	Uzbek	Single	Undocumented	2020
37	26	Male	Arabic	Single	Undocumented	2017
38	19	Male	Uzbek	Single	Undocumented	2019
39	22	Male	Pashtun	Engaged	Undocumented	2019
40	19	Male	Tajik	Single	Undocumented	2020
41	26	Male	Uzbek	Single	IP in different city	2017
42	32	Male	Tajik	Married	Residence permit	2013
43	28	Male	NA	Single	Undocumented	2019
44	29	Male	Tajik	Single	Undocumented	2018
45	52	Female	Tajik	Divorced	Residence permit	2015
46	27	Male	Tajik	Single	Undocumented	2015
47	27	Male	Uzbek	Single	Residence permit	2015
48	28	Male	Tajik	Single	Undocumented	2017
49	31	Male	Tajik	Single	Undocumented	2017
50	25	Male	Tajik	Single	Undocumented	2018



“ The smuggler put 40 of us on a minibus. But we had left our IDs. On our way to Istanbul, the police pulled us over, asked for ID but then let us go. We finally arrived at Istanbul and the driver dropped us off in Üsküdar. We took a cab from there to Zeytinburnu. It costed us 400 TL. A friend of mine, who was waiting for us at Azeri Mosque in Zeytinburnu, paid for the cab. ”

“ After coming to Istanbul for so many days I and my husband were looking to find a house but we failed, finally there was one afghan family who stays with residency, he rent a house for us by his documents. We are 6 people in a basement which has 2 rooms only; the house is very old and has insects and worms, so many times we insecticide the house but they didn't vanish. My children got skin problems. But we have no other choice than to live here. We don't know the house owner and got the house from property office which is an Afghan man. Yes sometimes that we don't pay on time he keeps coming to our home or calling us. Then we request him to give us time. We try our best not to create problem, otherwise he can easily compline us to police and we are not legal. ”

“ My finger was cut during construction work so I went to hospital. The doctor there didn't want to treat me and said “I don't want to betray my country.” I told him, don't betray your country then, just do something altruistic. He didn't so I stayed home and couldn't work for 2,5 months. It is good that God protects us from illness. If we get sick, we wouldn't be able to get by. If you live here undocumented, you cannot get your money. We are paid much less than other workers. Besides, we have no insurance. Even if you go to police, the first thing they ask is to show your ID. That's why we cannot even go to police. ”

“ I do not attend any meetings or gatherings. We do not have anything to do with these activities, we work. ”



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