

Migration and Immobility in Afghanistan: Understanding Drivers, Consequences, and Their Implications for Peace

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Abstract

This study examines both processes of migration and immobility in Afghanistan by focusing on two groups: Afghans currently residing within the country and Afghan migrants living abroad in Türkiye, Australia, the United States, Pakistan, India, Kyrgyzstan, and France. Utilizing a quantitative methodology, a purposive snowball sampling strategy was employed; two separate 20-question surveys were developed to assess demographics, drivers of migration or immobility, and the resulting impacts on participants' lives. The questionnaires were provided in English and Dari to maximize accessibility, and data were collected from 56 respondents aged 18 and above (n=34 residing in Afghanistan; n=22 residing abroad) during May and June of 2023. The study concludes that both migration and immobility significantly impact employment, income, social life, mental health, well-being, and access to public services, including healthcare, education, and legal services. Furthermore, migration and immobility influence the sending and receiving of remittances, the overall living situation of Afghans, and the broader prospects for peace. This study fills the gap in immobility literature within the context of Afghanistan and contributes to a deeper understanding of the drivers and consequences of population movement and its implications for peace. In light of the post-August 2021 migration wave, this study provides data for policymakers and academics in the fields of migration, immobility, and peace

studies, while advocating for support for both migrants and those who remain in the country.

Keywords: International Relations, Migration, Immobility, Peace, Afghanistan

Introduction

The Context

In the last decades, the global conversation about population movement has shifted from only focusing on those who migrate to considering the equally relevant concept of immobility, the drivers that prevent individuals from moving even when they have strong reasons to do so. This is a distinction that takes on an especial sense of urgency in settings demarcated by protracted instability and war, where both migration and the absence of migration have dire consequences for individual well-being and national stability.

Afghanistan is perhaps the most complex case of population displacement and immobility in the international community. The nation has been marked by war and political instability for more than four decades, creating immense migration flows. There have been six migration waves from Afghanistan. First, the pre-1979 migration. Second, the migration between 1979-1989 due to the Soviet Union's attack on Afghanistan. Third, the civil war period between 1989-1996 in Afghanistan which resulted in another wave of emigration from Afghanistan. Fourth, emigration during the first Taliban regime between 1996-2001. Fifth, the migration between 2001-2021 which was a period of emigration from Afghanistan and immigration to Afghanistan. The sixth and last wave of emigration from Afghanistan was in 2021 after the US and its allies withdrawal from Afghanistan (EUAA, 2022; Moghadam & Jadali, 2021; Naseh, 2025; Siavoshi, 2024). According to reports, afghan refugees are the third largest displaced populations in the world (Azimi, 2024).

It is essential to consider that while a large number of Afghans emigrated during the above-mentioned waves of migration, millions of Afghans could not migrate in those difficult times due to different immobility factors. Furthermore, both migration and immobility have impact and consequences on the migrants, immobile populations, and on peace.

The Literature

Kuschminder (2018) states that the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and the increasing insecurity are the reasons for emigration of Afghans from Afghanistan. She argues that Afghan migrants emigrate for their safety and security. Another research with similar findings states that the persistence of conflict, war, and violence has made Afghanistan a fragile state from which millions of its citizens have been forced to seek asylum in other countries

(İçduygu & Karadağ, 2018). The issue of families not being able to meet their basic livelihood needs is another factor for emigration from Afghanistan. Afghan households in this situation send an adult member of their household which in most cases are either the head of the household or the elder son to other countries in order to overcome this challenge (Wickramasekara & Baruah, 2013).

In regards to the impact of migration on migrants, a 2018 article on the effect of perceived discrimination on the mental health of Afghan Refugees states that low to moderate perceived discriminatory experiences of Afghan refugees results in psychological distress (Alemi & Stempel, 2018). Furthermore, unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan in the United Kingdom (UK) often experience a 'moral breakdown' because they are stuck between their aspirations to study, to travel, to enjoy life, to have fun, and their ties with their family due to the act of sending remittances (Meloni, 2020). Another research article on Afghan women residing in Adelaide, South Australia, for 2 years or less argues that these women experienced racism and a lack of access to services in transition countries like Pakistan. The article states that while access to social services is assured in Australia, there are still difficulties in accessing appropriate food and problems with language, housing, and employment for these migrants (Kavian et al., 2020).

While some articles explored the immobility phenomenon in case of Afghans migrants in Turkey and Iran (Kaytaz, 2016), Japan (Ogawa, 2025), Greece (Dimitriadi, 2018), Pakistan (Mielke & Etzold, 2022), and other countries, immobility in the case of Afghans residing in Afghanistan and its impacts on them has been critically under-researched by scholars particularly post August 2021. Furthermore, historical events change the dynamics of migration, which brings new factors or drivers for migration and immobility. The withdrawal of the United States (US) and other foreign military troops from Afghanistan in August 2021 is one of these historical events. So, it is essential to have new data on migration and immobility in the case of Afghans post August 2021.

The Research Gap and Questions

Despite the existing literature on the factors of migration and its impact on Afghan migrants, there is a significant lack of new data post August 2021 in this area. Furthermore, the factors of immobility and its impact on Afghans residing in Afghanistan especially post August 2021 have not been explored by researchers. Lastly, the migration-immobility-peace nexus in case of Afghanistan is significantly under-researched. To fill these gaps, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the drivers/factors that influence people of Afghanistan to migrate or not to migrate?

- What are the impacts of migration and immobility on Afghan citizens?
- What are the implications of migration and immobility for peace in Afghanistan?

Contribution and Implications

This article contributes to the literature on migration and immobility, their impacts, and implications for peace in Afghanistan. By examining these drivers and barriers, we can better understand the complex decision to migrate or remain. This article specifically examines the migration and immobility drivers, compares their social, economic, and psychological impacts on Afghans currently living in Afghanistan with those who have migrated, and their implications for peace.

The findings have invaluable implications for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers of international relations, migration studies, and peace studies in fragile contexts. By providing new perspectives, this study aims to inform policymaking that supports migrants, benefits vulnerable groups that remain behind, facilitates integration, and builds stronger societies in Afghanistan and beyond.

This article is organized as follows: Section 2 outlines the methodological approach used in this study. Section 3 presents the findings and discussion. The article concludes in section 4 with a summary of key arguments, a discussion of policy recommendations, and a roadmap for further research.

2. Methodology

Research Design and Sampling Strategy

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine the factors and impacts of migration and immobility in the Afghan context. The target population consists of two distinct groups: (1) Afghans residing within Afghanistan, and (2) Afghan migrants living outside Afghanistan in countries including Türkiye, Australia, the United States, Pakistan, India, Kyrgyzstan, and France. The main criteria for participating in this research were to hold Afghan nationality and to be at least 18 years of age.

Due to the sensitive nature of this study and the geographical dispersion of the population, a purposive snowball sampling strategy was utilized. Initially, I disseminated the survey questionnaires through my professional and social networks, who then acted as 'seeds' by sharing the instrument within their own respective networks. This chain-referral method was for reaching the participants especially the immobile individuals within Afghanistan who are often challenging to access through traditional sampling frames.

Data Collection and Instrument Design

Data were collected electronically via Google Forms using two separate questionnaires, each containing 20 questions. Each questionnaire was organized into three thematic sections:

- Section 1: Captured participants' demographic characteristics.
- Section 2: Explored factors influencing the decision to migrate or remain immobile.
- Section 3: Assessed the impact of migration and immobility on various aspects of the participants' lives.

The questionnaires were developed by the author and underwent a formal review for content validity by a faculty supervisor at the Social Sciences University of Ankara. To ensure conceptual equivalence across linguistic groups, the author-a native Dari speaker and fluent in English-prepared both English and Dari versions of the survey. The Dari version was prioritized to ensure clarity and cultural nuance, as it is one the national languages of Afghanistan.

Data Analysis

A total of 56 respondents participated in the study (n = 34 residing in Afghanistan; n=22 residing abroad). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specially measures of frequency distributions (counts and percentages). This analytical approach allowed for a comparative look at how factors and impacts of migration and immobility differ between migrants and those who remain in the country.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the ethical standards set forth by the Social Sciences University of Ankara and the supervision of the course academic supervisor. The principles for good research included in the Declaration of Helsinki were strictly followed. All fundamental ethical guidelines were followed: participation was voluntary, all participants were informed about the purpose and confidentiality of the research, participants' consent was obtained in advance, and strict measures were taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The data collected was stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

Demographic Data

The demographic data of participants includes variables such as age, gender, marital status, education level, and employment status. It further accounts for the place of residence, the presence of family members abroad, household size, and the duration of migration.

Table 1: Demographic data of participants

Afghans (Inside Afghanistan)				Afghan Migrants (Outside of Afghanistan)			
Age	n	%	Rank	Age	n	%	Rank
18-24	20	58.8	I	24-40	15	68.2	I
24-40	13	38.2	II	18-24	7	31.8	II
41-59	1	2.9	III	41-59	0	0.0	
60 and older	0	0.0		60 and older	0	0.0	
Gender	n	%	Rank	Gender	n	%	Rank
Male	22	64.7	I	M	19	86.4	I
Female	12	35.3	II	F	3	13.6	II
Marital Status	n	%	Rank	Marital Status	n	%	Rank
Single	26	76.5	I	Single	18	81.8	I
Engaged	6	17.6	II	Married	3	13.6	II
Married	2	5.9	III	Engaged	1	4.5	III
Divorced	0	0.0		Divorced	0	0.0	
Education Level	n	%	Rank	Education Level	n	%	Rank
Bachelor	26	76.5	I	Bachelor	13	59.1	I
High School	4	11.8	II	Master or higher	6	27.3	II
Master or higher	4	11.8	II	High School	2	9.1	III
No Education	0	0.0		No Education	1	4.5	IV
Up to 6th Class	0	0.0		Up to 6th Class	0	0.0	
Employment Status	n	%	Rank	Employment Status	n	%	Rank
Employed	18	52.9	I	Employed	14	63.6	I
Student	8	23.5	II	Student	4	18.2	II
Unemployed	5	14.7	III	Unemployed	3	13.6	III
Self-employed	3	8.8	IV	Self-employed	1	4.5	IV
Retired	0	0.0		Retired	0	0.0	
If any family members or relatives live abroad	n	%	Rank	Where do you live?	n	%	Rank
Yes (Uncle, Aunt, Cousin, or other relatives)	18	52.9	I	Turkey	6	27.3	I
Yes (Parent, Sibling, Children or other family member)	14	41.2	II	Australia	5	22.7	II
No	2	5.9	III	United States	5	22.7	II
Number of family members	n	%	Rank	Pakistan	2	9.1	III
5-10	25	73.5	I	India	2	9.1	III
More than 10	5	14.7	II	Other	1	4.5	IV
0-5	4	11.8	III	(Kyrgyzstan)			
Migration plan in the future	n	%	Rank	Other (France)	1	4.5	IV
Yes	27	79.4	I	How long have you been living outside Afghanistan?	n	%	Rank
No	7	20.6	II	1 – 5 years	13	59.1	I
				0 – 1 year	6	27.3	II
				More than 10 years	2	9.1	III
				5 – 10 years	1	4.5	IV

Table 1 presents a detailed breakdown of the demographic characteristics for both participants residing in Afghanistan and Afghan migrants.

3. Findings and Discussion

The findings of this research are divided into two sections. The first section discusses the factors driving migration and immobility, while the second section examines the impact of migration and immobility on various aspects of the lives of people of Afghanistan.

3.1 Drivers/Factors of migration and immobility

There are various factors influencing people's decisions to migrate from Afghanistan or to remain, whether voluntarily or due to an inability to migrate (immobility).

Table 2: Drivers/Factors of migration and immobility

Afghans (Inside Afghanistan)				Afghan Migrants (Outside of Afghanistan)			
Main reason for not migrating from Afghanistan	n	%	Rank	Main reason for migrating from Afghanistan	n	%	Rank
I have to stay to support and take care of my family	13	38.2	I	War/Conflict in Afghanistan	13	59.1	I
I do not have a valid passport	7	20.6	II	Education purpose	5	22.7	II
I do not have enough money to migrate	5	14.7	III	Unemployment/economic instability in Afghanistan	3	13.6	III
I cannot get a visa	5	14.7	III	Other (for me all options were my reasons to migrate)	1	4.5	IV
Other (I am planning to go to another country in near future)	3	8.8	IV	To earn money in another country to support myself and my family	0	0.0	
I have a good job in Afghanistan	1	2.9	V	To live with my family/family member	0	0.0	
I am happy in Afghanistan and I want to stay in my own country	0	0.0		Other reasons for migrating from Afghanistan	n	%	Rank
Other reasons ¹ for not migrating from Afghanistan	n	%	Rank	Unemployment/economic instability in Afghanistan	12	54.5	I
I cannot get a visa	16	47.1	I	War/Conflict in Afghanistan	10	45.5	II
I do not have enough money to migrate	11	32.4	II	Education purpose	8	36.4	III
I do not have a valid passport	10	29.4	III	To earn money in another country to support myself and my family	4	18.2	IV
I have to stay to support and take care of my family	6	17.6	IV	To live with my family/family member	3	13.6	V
I have a good job in Afghanistan	3	8.8	V	Other (To have a good life)	1	4.5	VI
I am happy in Afghanistan and I want to stay in my own country	2	5.9	VI				
Other (Education)	1	2.9	VII				

Table 2 presents the main (primary) reasons for not migrating from Afghanistan: supporting and caring for family (38.2%), lacking a valid passport (20.6%), insufficient financial resources to migrate (14.7%), and the inability to obtain a visa (14.7%). Secondary reasons, ranked from highest to

¹ In this question, participants were given the option to select multiple reasons—other than the primary reason identified in the previous question—for their decision to migrate or not migrate. The fact that percentages in this section sum to more than 100% is due to participants being permitted to choose multiple responses.

lowest frequency, include the inability to obtain a visa (47.1%), lack of financial resources (32.4%), lack of a valid passport (29.4%), and remaining to support and care for family (17.6%).

In Afghanistan, it is a cultural norm for multiple generations to reside together; adults often remain in the same household with parents and siblings even after marriage and having children. This preference has persisted for decades. Furthermore, Afghan households typically depend on the income of the head of the household, although some families have multiple earners. Given this context, family ties emerge as a primary driver of immobility due to two factors. First, the individual most capable of migrating is often the household's sole breadwinner. This person cannot easily migrate and leave their family behind, as settling in a new country and establishing an income is a time-consuming process. Second, the prospect of migrating and living alone in a new society is particularly challenging for individuals who have lived within a close-knit family structure their entire lives. This challenge is even more pronounced for women due to prevailing cultural norms.

Another significant barrier currently impeding migration is the difficulty of obtaining or renewing a passport. Following the political changes in August 2021, Afghanistan has faced persistent administrative issues in passport issuance, preventing citizens from crossing borders legally. Additionally, the high cost of migration is a prohibitive factor. With the majority of the population living below the poverty line and surviving on daily or monthly wages without savings, most families cannot afford the expense of legal migration. Furthermore, visa access is severely restricted. Currently, Afghans can only apply for visas at four embassies: Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and Turkey. Of these, Russia and Turkey primarily issue student visas, while Iran and Pakistan issue medical, student, and occasional tourist visas under very stringent conditions. Most other embassies remain closed or do not provide services to Afghan citizens, further contributing to involuntary immobility.

The number of participants staying in the country voluntarily is very low. Primary reasons for voluntary stay include those who intended to move in the future (8.8%) and those holding a good job in Afghanistan (2.9%). Additional reasons cited were job satisfaction (8.8%), being happy in Afghanistan (5.9%), and education (2.9%). While voluntary immobility exists, these findings suggest that the proportion of individuals choosing to stay is minimal compared to those facing involuntary immobility.

Table 2 also details the primary motivations for migrating from Afghanistan: war and conflict (59.1%)—consistent with the findings of İçduygu and Karadağ (2018), as well as Kuscminder (2018)—followed by education (22.7%) and unemployment or economic instability (13.6%), which aligns with the work of Wickramasekara and Baruah (2013). Additional motivations include unemployment and economic instability (54.5%), war and conflict

(45.5%), education (36.4%), earning money to support family (18.2%), family reunification (13.6%), and seeking a better quality of life (4.5%).

War and conflict have been central issues in Afghanistan for over 40 years, negatively impacting every aspect of life. These conditions have led to the loss of family breadwinners and a weakened economy, forcing many below the poverty line. Consequently, households often decide to send one member abroad—to countries such as Iran—to work and send remittances back home. Pursuing higher education is the second most common driver for migration. Young people often move abroad for studies and frequently remain there to work after graduation to support their families. Due to economic instability at home, many are reluctant to return and risk the value of their education and professional efforts.

Unemployment and economic instability are issues that people in Afghanistan have dealt with for a long time, and it is linked to the war and conflict in the country (Human Concern International, 2023). This is one of the main reasons for migrating to other countries for people in Afghanistan (Amu TV, 2024). Another factor identified in this research—though cited as a secondary rather than a primary reason—is migration for the purpose of reuniting with family members, though this occurs relatively infrequently in the Afghan context.

3.2 Consequences/Impacts of Migration and Immobility

Both migration and immobility (the inability to migrate) can impact various aspects of people's lives; in this section, I will discuss these impacts.

3.2.1 Employment and Income

One of the impacts of migration and immobility is the change in individuals' employment situations as well as shifts in their income. In this section, I discuss these topics as they relate to the people of Afghanistan:

Table 3: The impact of migration and immobility on employment and income of people of Afghanistan

Afghans (Inside Afghanistan)				Afghan Migrants (Outside of Afghanistan)			
	n	%	Rank		n	%	Rank
Employment				Employment			
I work in a worse job than before	12	35.3	I	I work in a better job than before	7	31.8	I
I work in a better job than before	7	20.6	II	I am a student (Did not have a job/Do not have a job)	6	27.3	II
				Other ²	3	13.6	III

² 1- I was unemployed in Afghanistan; I am working here now but the working condition is not good.

2- I was a medical doctor in Afghanistan, when I moved to Australia, they did not accept my medical degree to work in medical field, in Australia there is a procedure which includes exams, interviews, language proficiency, and you need to get certain scores which is both

I am a student (Did not have a job/Do not have a job)	7	20.6	II	I work in the same job as before	2	9.1	IV
I work in the same job as before	4	11.8	III	I work in a worse job than before	2	9.1	IV
I lost my job and I am unemployed	4	11.8	III	I lost my job and I am unemployed	2	9.1	IV
Other	0	0.0		Income	n	%	Rank
Income	n	%	Rank	My income is more than before	11	50.0	I
My income is less than before	13	38.2	I	My income is same as before	5	22.7	II
My income is more than before	8	23.5	II	My income is less than before	3	13.6	III
I am a student (Did not have an income/Do not have an income)	8	23.5	II	I am a student (Did not have an income/Do not have an income)	3	13.6	III
My income is same as before	5	14.7	III				

Table 3 shows that the majority of people who could not migrate and currently live in Afghanistan experience a negative impact on their employment situation and their income, although some people also experience a positive impact.

People work in worse jobs than before (35.3%), have lost their jobs and are unemployed (11.8%), or have seen their income decrease (38.2%), all of which are negative impacts of immobility. After the United States and other foreign countries withdrew from Afghanistan in August 2021, several organizations and businesses ceased their activities. Many more began downsizing their staff due to having fewer projects. Embassies moved out of Afghanistan, and all these factors together created a situation in which people lost their jobs or were forced to work for a lower salary in the same positions as before.

Data from Table 3 also shows that some people work in better jobs than before (20.6%) in Afghanistan, and there has been an income increase for some (23.5%). To explain this, I argue that after August 2021, some individuals who left the country held senior positions in organizations and businesses. This created an opportunity for those who could not move and stayed in Afghanistan to fill these positions, resulting in better jobs and higher incomes than before, though the number of these people is low.

Regarding the impact of migration on the employment and income of migrants, the impact is mostly positive; the majority of migrants claim they have better jobs (31.8%) and better incomes (50%) compared to the past. However, there were also migrants who had worse jobs (9.1%) and less income than before (13.6%). Some migrants also claim they lost their jobs and are currently unemployed due to migration (9.1%).

stressful and expensive. It took 5 years for me to complete this procedure and after almost 6 years I was able to work in my own field and currently I am working in a private hospital.

3- I was unemployed in Afghanistan and since I recently migrated to United States, I do not have a job yet and I want to continue my studies here.

There is one negative case in which a participant discussed their experience regarding the impact of migration on their employment as follows: "I was a medical doctor in Afghanistan; when I moved to Australia, they did not accept my medical degree for work in the medical field. In Australia, there is a procedure that includes exams, interviews, and language proficiency requirements, and you need to achieve certain scores, which is both stressful and expensive. It took five years for me to complete this procedure, and after almost six years, I was able to work in my field; currently, I am working in a private hospital." This particular case shows how migration can be stressful and difficult for people from Afghanistan, even if they hold educational degrees and have work experience in a specific field.

3.2.2 Social Life

To find out the impact of migration and immobility on the social life of the people of Afghanistan, I asked the participants how their current social situation compares to the past in terms of participating in parties and events, interacting with or meeting friends, family, and relatives, and going outside.

Table 4: The impact of migration and immobility on social life of people of Afghanistan

Afghans (Inside Afghanistan)				Afghan Migrants (Outside of Afghanistan)			
Social Life	n	%	Rank	Social Life	n	%	Rank
My social life is worse than before	26	76.5	I	My social life is worse than before	13	59.1	I
My social life is almost same as before	6	17.6	II	My social life is better than before	5	22.7	II
My social life is better than before	2	5.9	III	My social life is almost same as before	4	18.2	III

Table 4 shows that the social life of the majority of people who cannot migrate due to immobility factors is worse than before (76.5%); some respondents also say that there is no change in their social life (17.6%), and a few claim that their social life is better than before (5.9%).

Due to the current economic situation in Afghanistan, it is difficult for people to host regular parties or events as they did previously. People cannot afford to go out for picnics very often. It is also worth mentioning that most people currently in Afghanistan cannot meet their relatives and friends as they did in past years because those individuals have migrated from the country, which has impacted their social lives and interactions.

Regarding migrants, Table 4 shows that they also believe their social life is worse than before (59.1%); however, some say that their social life is better (22.7%), while others claim that their social life is almost the same as it was before migrating (18.2%).

People who live in Afghanistan generally have very active social lives; they constantly visit their relatives and friends at various events and parties,

and they are essentially in contact with one another all the time. Once they migrate from Afghanistan, this connection is severed because they cannot see their friends, family, and relatives as they did before, which explains why most Afghan migrants in this research believe their social life is worse than before.

3.2.3 Mental Health and Wellbeing

Migration and immobility can both have an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of people; this impact can be either negative or positive.

Table 5: The impact of migration and immobility on mental health and wellbeing of people of Afghanistan

Afghans (Inside Afghanistan)				Afghan Migrants (Outside of Afghanistan)			
	n	%	Rank		n	%	Rank
Mental health and wellbeing				Mental health and wellbeing			
My mental health and wellbeing is worse than before (more stressed/anxious/worried)	27	79.4	I	My mental health and wellbeing is worse than before (more stressed/anxious/worried)	11	50.0	I
My mental health and wellbeing is same as before	5	14.7	II	My mental health and wellbeing is better than before (more calm/happy)	9	40.9	II
My mental health and wellbeing is better than before (more calm/happy)	2	5.9	III	My mental health and wellbeing is same as before	2	9.1	III

Table 5 presents that the majority of both migrants (50.0%) and people living in Afghanistan (79.4%) say that their mental health and wellbeing are worse than before; however, the number of migrants (40.9%) who responded that their mental health and wellbeing are better than before is much higher compared to those remaining in Afghanistan (5.9%) who gave the same answer.

People in Afghanistan are more stressed, anxious, and worried than before. While there are very few active conflict incidents in the country compared to the past—which, on the surface, might be assumed to have a positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the people—the economic situation of families and the overall economic situation of the country, as well as people's concerns about their future, have significant negative impacts on their mental health and wellbeing. This situation can also impact Afghan migrants living in other countries because they now have to send more money to support their families. By this statement, I mean that in the past, it was acceptable for a migrant to occasionally skip sending money for a month to their family in Afghanistan because there was typically another family member with an income who could cover living costs. However, now that many people have lost their jobs and incomes in Afghanistan, these families depend completely on these migrants, which can create stress and anxiety for them.

We also see that some migrants stated that their mental health and wellbeing are better than before. I argue that these migrants are in a better

condition because they have jobs and good incomes, which enables them to support their families in Afghanistan through sending money to them, making them less worried about their families. There can be other reasons for the improved mental health and wellbeing of migrants, such as having the opportunity to continue their education or experiencing life in a country with overall better living conditions.

3.2.4 Access to Public Services

In this section, I will see how migration and immobility impact access to public services, such as healthcare, education, and legal services, for the people of Afghanistan.

3.2.4.1 Healthcare

Having access to healthcare is an essential part of life and a right for every individual, but sometimes there can be barriers to accessing this right.

Table 6: The impact of migration and immobility on access to healthcare services for people of Afghanistan

Afghans (Inside Afghanistan)				Afghan Migrants (Outside of Afghanistan)			
	n	%	Rank		n	%	Rank
Do you or your family member have issues in accessing healthcare services? (Hospitals, Doctors, Medicine, ...)				Do you or your family member have issues in accessing healthcare? (Hospitals, Doctors, Medicine, ...)			
No	18	52.9	I	No	15	68.2	I
Yes, due to not availability of good doctors and health service providers	14	41.2	II	Yes, due to not having enough money	2	9.1	II
Yes, due to not having enough money	1	2.9	III	Yes, due to language barriers	2	9.1	II
Other (quality of medicine is very low)	1	2.9	III	Yes, due to not having required documents (resident permit)	2	9.1	II
				Other (One of our family members cannot benefit from health services like others and has to take private health insurance due to the visa type that they have)	1	4.5	III

Table 6 shows that the majority of those who live in Afghanistan (52.9%) and the majority of migrants (68.2%) did not have any issues in accessing healthcare services at the time this data was collected. The difference is obvious when comparing the barriers to accessing healthcare among these two groups; in Afghanistan, people (41.2%) say that the issues with accessing healthcare services are a lack of good health service providers and the absence of skilled doctors, not having enough money (2.9%), and the low quality of medicine (2.9%).

Although Afghanistan is not considered an advanced country in the medical field, there are experienced doctors with various specializations. The main issue, however, is that after the changes in August 2021, several skilled doctors migrated from the country, which negatively impacted health service

providers. Additionally, the economic situation of some families makes it difficult for them to access healthcare services. Finally, the quality of medicine is low due to the fact that most medicines are imported; for people to afford them, companies lower the quality of these medicines, but this does not mean that all medicine in Afghanistan is of low quality.

The barriers to accessing healthcare services among migrants are: not having enough money (9.1%), a language barrier (9.1%), and not having the required residency documents (9.1%).

Accessing healthcare services can be difficult, especially when you do not have health insurance. In the case of these migrants, most do not have it, and without health insurance, it can be very expensive to access these services. The language barrier is another issue for migrants, especially considering that medical terms are difficult to understand. Finally, not having the required documents (residency documents) is a barrier to accessing healthcare services for migrants.

3.2.4.2 Education

Access to education is a fundamental human right; however, the ability of the people of Afghanistan to access this right varies significantly depending on whether they remain inside the country or have migrated abroad.

Table 7: The impact of migration and immobility on access to education for people of Afghanistan

Afghans (Inside Afghanistan)				Afghan Migrants (Outside of Afghanistan)			
	n	%	Rank		n	%	Rank
Do you or your family member have any issue in accessing education services? (School, University, Courses, ...)				Do you or your family member have any issue in accessing education services? (School, University, Courses, ...)			
Yes, due to education centers being closed/ not being available	30	88.2	I	No	15	68.2	I
No	2	5.9	II	Yes, due to not having required documents (resident permit)	4	18.2	II
Yes, due to not having enough money	2	5.9	II	Yes, due to language barriers	2	9.1	III
				Yes, due to not having enough money	1	4.5	IV

Table 7 presents that access to education is one of the biggest issues for those who live in Afghanistan, due to education centers (schools, universities, courses, etc.) being closed or unavailable (88.2%), and also due to not having enough money (5.2%).

The majority of participants said that either they themselves or one of their family members do not have access to education. This is mostly due to the ban on education for girls above the 6th grade in Afghanistan. The second issue is, again, the economic situation of some families, which makes it harder for them to send their children to school or university.

Table 7 also shows that, the majority of migrants (68.2%) have access to education services, while some migrants cannot benefit from this right due to not having the required residency documents (18.2%), a language barrier (9.1%), or not having enough money (4.5%).

Afghan migrants who do not have the required documentation for the host country cannot enjoy their educational rights. It also takes time to learn a new language, which can be a barrier to accessing education. Lastly, the economic situation of Afghan migrants is also one of the barriers to this right.

3.2.4.3 Legal Services

Legal services were specified to participants of this research as document verification, document notarization, obtaining an official marriage certificate or document, obtaining an identification card (ID), address registration, and other similar services.

Table 8: The impact of migration and immobility on access to legal services for people of Afghanistan

Afghans (Inside Afghanistan)				Afghan Migrants (Outside Afghanistan)			
	n	%	Rank		n	%	Rank
Do you or your family member have any issue in accessing legal services? (Documents verification, Marriage certificate, NID, ...)				Do you or your family member have any issue in accessing legal services? (Documents verification/Notarizing, address registration, Marriage certificate, NID, ...)			
Yes, due to these services being closed/ not being available	25	73.5	I	No	13	59.1	I
No	6	17.6	II	Yes, due to not having required documents (resident permit)	5	22.7	II
Yes, due to not having enough money	3	8.8	III	Yes, due to not having enough money	2	9.1	III
				Yes, due to language barriers	2	9.1	III

Table 8 presents that the majority of people living in Afghanistan have issues accessing legal services due to these services being closed or unavailable (73.5%), and due to not having enough money (8.8%). Others (17.6%) said that they do not have any issues accessing these services.

Currently, some services, such as obtaining a marriage certificate, are not easy to access in Afghanistan. These and other similar services were directly impacted after the changes in August 2021; the second barrier in this regard is the cost of these services, which is unaffordable for some families considering their economic situation.

The majority of migrants (59.1%), on the other hand, said that they do not have any issues accessing legal services. However, a major issue for migrants in accessing some services is, again, not having the required residency documents (22.7%). Other barriers to accessing these services for migrants are not having enough money (9.1%) and a language barrier (9.1%).

3.2.5 Overall Living Situation

Considering all the impacts of migration and not migrating or not being able to migrate, what do the people of Afghanistan—both those living inside the country and those living outside—think about their overall living situation? Is it better or worse than before?

Table 9: The impact of migration and immobility on overall living situation of people of Afghanistan

Afghans (Inside Afghanistan)			Afghan Migrants (Outside of Afghanistan)			
	n	%		n	%	
Overall living situation			Overall living situation			
Worse than before	24	70.6	I	13	59.1	I
Same as before	7	20.6	II	5	22.7	II
Better than before	3	8.8	III	4	18.2	III

Table 9 presents that the living situation of the majority of people in Afghanistan (70.6%) is worse than before, while some (20.6%) said that their living situation has not changed, and others (8.8%) said their living situation is better than before.

The majority of migrants (59.1%) claimed that their living situation is better than before, some migrants (22.7%) said their living situation is worse than before, and other migrants (18.2%) said their living situation has not changed compared to the past.

Comparing the overall living situation of those who live in Afghanistan and those who live outside Afghanistan, I argue that the reason for this difference is the impact of immobility and migration on these individuals, which I discussed in the previous parts of this research paper. Some of these impacts are: access to public services is easier for migrants than it is for those living in Afghanistan, and the impact of immobility on employment and income is mostly negative, whereas the impact of migration on the employment and income of migrants is mostly positive.

3.2.6 Sending/Receiving Remittance:

In this section, I will examine whether migrants send money to their families or relatives back home, how often they send money, and the amount they send monthly. I will also discuss whether those in Afghanistan receive money from abroad sent by family members or relatives, the frequency of these transfers, and the monthly amounts received.

Table 10: Sending/Receiving remittance

Afghans (Inside Afghanistan)			Afghan Migrants (Outside of Afghanistan)			
	n	%		n	%	
Do you receive money from your family members or relatives who live abroad?			Do you send money to your family members or relatives who live in Afghanistan?			
No	17	50.0	I	10	45.5	I
Yes, Every 1 – 3 months	10	29.4	II	7	31.8	II
Yes, Every month	3	8.8	III	5	22.7	III

How much money do you receive monthly from your family members or relatives who live abroad?				How much money do you send monthly to your family members or relatives who live in Afghanistan?			
	n	%	Rank		n	%	Rank
Yes, Once a year	3	8.8	III	Yes, Twice a year	0	0.0	
Yes, Twice a year	1	2.9	IV	Yes, Once a year	0	0.0	
How much money do you receive monthly from your family members or relatives who live abroad?				How much money do you send monthly to your family members or relatives who live in Afghanistan?			
Zero	17	50.0	I	Zero	10	45.5	I
1 – 100 dollars	11	32.4	II	101 – 500 dollars	5	22.7	II
101 – 500 dollars	6	17.6	III	1 – 100 dollars	4	18.2	III
More than 500 dollars	0	0.0		More than 500 dollars	3	13.6	IV

Table 10 shows that although many participants in this research stated that they have family members (parents, siblings, children, or others) living in another country (41.2%), or relatives (uncles, aunts, cousins, or others) living abroad (52.9%), half of these participants (50%) said they do not receive money from them. Other participants from Afghanistan noted that they receive money from abroad either every 1–3 months (29.4%), every month (8.8%), once a year (8.8%), or twice a year (2.9%). Regarding the monthly average, half of the participants (50%) reported receiving nothing, while some (32.4%) received between 1 and 100 dollars, and others (17.6%) received between 101 and 500 dollars.

The reason that half of these respondents reported not receiving money from family or relatives living abroad may be due to two factors. First, more than half of the participants (52.9%) living in Afghanistan in this research were employed (see Table 1). Second, the family members or relatives living abroad may not be properly settled yet (lacking jobs or a stable income), or they may not be close relatives (i.e., not first-degree relatives).

The majority of migrants stated that they send money to their family members or relatives in Afghanistan either every month (31.8%) or every 1–3 months (22.7%). Other migrants (45.5%) stated that they do not send money to family members or relatives in Afghanistan. In terms of the monthly amount sent, a significant portion (45.5%) said they do not send money, while others send between 101–500 dollars (22.7%), 1–100 dollars (18.2%), or more than 500 dollars (13.6%).

A likely reason that some migrants (45.5%) do not send money to Afghanistan is that they are not yet settled in their destination country; most migrants in this research had migrated from Afghanistan either less than a year ago (27.3%) or between 1 and 5 years ago (59.1%) (see Table 1).

3.2.7 Migration Suggestion for Others:

Considering all the positive and negative impacts of migration and immobility on the lives of the people of Afghanistan, what do those living in

Afghanistan and those who have migrated suggest to others regarding whether they should migrate or stay?

Table 11: Migration suggestion for others

Afghans (Inside Afghanistan)					Afghan Migrants (Outside Afghanistan)				
Do you recommend not migrating from Afghanistan to others?	n	%	Rank	Do you recommend migrating from Afghanistan to others?	n	%	Rank		
No	13	38.2	I	Yes	12	54.5	I		
Yes	11	32.4	II	No comment	9	40.9	II		
No comment	10	29.4	III	No	1	4.5	III		

Table 11 presents that participants from Afghanistan who recommend migrating to others (38.3%) are ranked first, followed by those who do not recommend migrating (32.4%), and those who did not want to answer the question (29.4%).

Among Afghan migrants, those who recommend migrating to others (54.5%) are ranked first, followed by those who did not want to answer the question (40.9%), and those who do not recommend migrating (4.5%).

Considering the negative impacts of immobility—as suggested by the findings of this research—the fact that nearly two-thirds of participants in Afghanistan either did not recommend migrating or declined to answer suggests they might be hesitant to engage with such questions or state their honest opinions. Even a significant portion of Afghan migrants (40.9%) indicated that they did not want to answer this question.

3.3 Migration and Immobility's Implications for Peace in Afghanistan

It is important to consider whether a nation is experiencing negative peace (the absence of direct violence) or moving toward positive peace (social justice and freedom from structural violence) (Galtung, 1969). Currently, Afghanistan experiences what can be described as negative peace; although the absence of active conflict compared to past decades is a significant achievement, the country lacks social justice, economic stability, and global recognition. Currently, the Afghan authorities have issued dozens of orders limiting women's rights to education, work, and movement (UN Women, 2025; U.S. Department of States, n.d.). Furthermore, migration can ease tension at home—such as through remittances easing economic pressure—or intensify it through "brain drain" or social tension from returnees.

Emigration and Brain Drain

Due to waves of emigration, Afghanistan has been losing its skilled citizens, including health professionals, engineers, academics, students, and highly skilled workers. This situation makes the roadmap to positive peace more difficult because the country is constantly being deprived of its human

capital. This outflow of skilled Afghans has caused serious issues in different sectors, including education, healthcare, and development. For instance, there are only 0.33 medical professionals per 1,000 Afghans, which is far below the recommended rate of 2.5 by the World Health Organization (KabulNow, 2025; Sadat, 2025).

Immobility and Vulnerability

Those who want to migrate but cannot due to the immobility factors discussed in this study—such as family responsibilities, economic constraints, and a lack of documentation (passports or visas)—often face unemployment, restrictions on accessing public services, and social limitations. These conditions are the main causes of hopelessness among Afghans, especially the youth. This results in psychological trauma, and those suffering from this trauma cannot effectively engage in the collective action required to achieve positive peace (Claske Dijkema, 2007; UN Women, 2025).

Dual role in peacebuilding

There are two sides to migration and its impact on peace. Migrants abroad can promote peace through advocacy, remittances, and skill transfers, but the loss of human resources inside Afghanistan may deepen vulnerabilities. Immobile populations, if neglected, may become marginalized and lose their voice in the transition to positive peace.

On the other hand, the contributions of migrants and the diaspora—particularly through remittances—are a critical economic lifeline for those inside Afghanistan (The Global Economy, n.d.; World Bank Group, 2024). While these funds provide a crucial shield against total collapse, they do not address the root causes of the economic crisis, such as the high unemployment rate (Sarwari, 2025). The diaspora also engages in advocacy and peacebuilding, with organizations leveraging their expertise to influence Western actors and facilitate aid and skills transfer (Afghan Diaspora Initiative, n.d.; Battiston, 2022).

Summary

In sum, Afghanistan's migration-immobility dynamics illustrate why peace must be understood beyond the mere absence of active conflict. Addressing the challenges and opportunities faced by both migrants and immobile populations is essential for transforming the country's current negative peace into a more sustainable and inclusive positive peace.

Conclusion

This research set out to find the drivers and impacts of migration and immobility among the Afghan population and their implications for peace.

The findings confirm that both migration and immobility have an impact on employment, income, social life, mental health, well-being, and access to public services, including healthcare, education, and legal services. Furthermore, migration and immobility influence the sending and receiving of remittances, the overall living situation of Afghans, and the broader prospects for peace.

According to our data, the decision to migrate is due to economic and security concerns. On the other hand, immobility is due to family responsibilities, lack of documentation, and economic barriers. While those who migrated had a choice to take action and move to another place, on the contrary, based on the research, immobility is an active constraint with significantly negative impacts, underscoring the urgent need to view it as a structural vulnerability where basic human needs are systematically denied to immobile populations.

This study offers two main contributions to policy and academic understanding. First, by providing up-to-date data on the post-August 2021 migration wave and including the immobility factors, the research fills the three gaps in migration literature, which are timely data on migration post-August 2021, data on immobility, and an empirical study of both mobile and immobile populations within the same contemporary crisis context. Second, the findings suggest a policy approach to support both the mobility and diaspora and address immobility and vulnerability in the context of the Afghan population. It suggests that policies should safeguard the ability of migrants to send remittances back home and, through the diaspora networks, do advocacy for Afghans inside Afghanistan; on the other hand, policies should prioritize the provision of basic services for Afghans, create opportunities, and aim to move the situation towards a country with positive peace.

It is important to recognize the needs of Afghan migrants and Afghan immobile populations, particularly based on their unique situations, and not use a generalized approach. As shown in the findings of this study, effective aid and programming must be based on authentic, updated data and the specific needs proposed by the affected people themselves. Furthermore, international actors, including governments, INGOs, and CSOs, must ensure that their support projects are developed and scaled based on such evidence-based research.

While this research offers timely and highly important quantitative insights, it is subject to several limitations. There is a need for more quantitative research with a higher sample size, qualitative research for a more in-depth understanding of the situation of Afghans, especially the immobile population, and research with the same approach but with a focus on gender perspective, because the full scope of gendered impacts of migration and immobility remains partially obscured.

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