



## MIGRATION FROM AFGHANISTAN: MIGRATION ROUTE AND AFGHANS IN TURKEY

When we look at the recent political history of Afghanistan, we can see that the country is troubled with a series of developments that are far from peace and stability for almost the last 40 years. If we look at the historical sequence of events, the instability process started after the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) entered Afghanistan with a military operation in 1979 and continued after the USSR's withdrawal in 1989. In 1991 the USSR collapsed. Later on Taliban formed in 1994, and captured Kabul in 1995 and dominated most of the country until 1998. Afghanistan was governed by the strict sharia laws of the Taliban until 2001. After the United States of America (USA) entered Afghanistan with military operations where the Al-Qaeda, which was shown as the perpetrator of the September 11 attacks in 2001, was protected by the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Taliban were driven out of the capital, Kabul, and a new era began for Afghanistan.

In this new process, despite the decrease in security threats in the protected areas with the support of the military forces of the USA and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) states, important breakthroughs regarding the development process of the country have not been achieved sufficiently in the last 20 years. In addition, the process of regaining dominance of the Taliban, which has gained strength since 2006, was delayed by the increase in the number of USA soldiers during the periods of George Bush and Barack Obama, but was largely completed with the Taliban's capture of Kabul on August 15<sup>th</sup> 2021. Thus, after nearly 20 years, the Taliban once again seized power in Afghanistan, as well as established dominance in almost all of the country except for the province of Panjshir.

Millions of Afghans, who followed all these developments with concern, started to flee the country legally or illegally in order not to live under the rule of the Taliban. It is estimated that this process may cause similar results to the large forced migration flows that occurred as a result of the civil war in Syria. In this context, Iran, Pakistan and Tajikistan are among the first destinations of Afghans. However, when we look at the main destination routes, it is understood that Afghans who fled the country want to migrate to Turkey and Western European countries. This wave of migration is currently carried out on two main routes. On the first route, passing through Iran to Turkey and then entering Europe via Greece or Italy to reach the destination countries. On the second route, after passing from Afghanistan to Pakistan, they enter Iran from the southern regions, from there passing through Turkey, and then reaching the targeted countries via Greece or Italy.

While it has been argued that the Taliban's closing of the country's borders has led Afghans who want to leave the country to resort to illegal ways, interviews with various media organizations provide us with interesting information about the migration route, the operation process of the smuggling network and its prices. When the two routes are compared, in the first one, the transits to Iran from the provinces of Nimruz, Farah and Herat and from there to Turkey via Van are more reasonable in terms of time and travel distance. However, it is stated that in 2020, this route is not preferred much because of the dangerous attitudes of the Iranian security forces against illegal immigrants in the country, some of which resulted in death, and a new alternative route has been developed. For this reason, the Afghanistan-Pakistan-Iran route has started to be used more widely. It is known that on this route, after entering Pakistan's

Balochistan province, immigrants passed through the Taftan Mountain region to Iran and then entered Turkey via Van.

If we look at the details of this illegal immigration process, the cost of illegally transporting immigrants to Istanbul in the immigration journey starting from Afghanistan is normally between 600-800 dollars, it is stated that these days, due to the Taliban's taking over the country and Turkey's increased border security, it has increased to 1,500 dollars. The journey begins after the money is left at the exchange offices to be delivered to the guarantors with the use of the "hawala" method. The guarantors, on the other hand, pay their share to various smuggling groups in each country after they deliver the migrants to the next delivery point. Thus, during the whole journey, different groups transport illegal immigrants to the cities they want to reach within this smuggling network.

As the first destination, irregular immigrant groups of 30-40 people pass through the border to the Balochistan province of Pakistan and are handed over to other smugglers. It is also stated that there is a large increase in border crossings of different smugglers. Immigrants, accompanied by different groups of smugglers from Balochistan to the Iranian border, enter Iran from various points in addition to around Taftan Mountain and are settled in some villages on the border line with Pakistan. Immigrants collected from here by buses are first brought to Tehran and then to the cities of Khoy and Maku in the north of Iran, and are transported in small groups from Khoy to Van and from Maku to East Beyazit. In general, it is reported that five different routes and at least 10 villages are used extensively for crossings in Turkey. After reaching Van, the journey of immigrants continues through Malatya and Diyarbakir to their destination in the western provinces of Turkey.

In this regard, the fact that Turkey is the main destination or transit country, as in the migration crisis in Syria, causes the government to take various steps. Unlike the situation in the migration crisis in Syria, the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated that Turkey was not in a position to handle a second wave of migration and preparations and diplomatic steps were taken on related various issues, especially security. Among these measures, there are works to build a wall on Turkey's 560-kilometer border with Iran. According to the information published by the Ministry of Interior, works are continuing on the remaining parts of the wall construction, of which 155.5 kilometers have been completed since 2015. In this framework, with the completion of the construction of the wall in Van, which covers 295 kilometers of the border, it is envisaged that the wall will be extended to Hakkari and closed with a wall up to the junction point of the Iran-Iraq border. In this regard, various works are carried out in order to increase the security of the borders of other neighboring countries. For instance, Interior Minister of Turkey, Suleyman Soylu announced that the construction of a wall on 837 kilometers of the 911 kilometer border with Syria and the equipping of this area with lighting, fiber optic systems, sensors and night vision cameras have been completed. Moreover, he stated that the wall construction works continue on the borders of Georgia and Armenia. When we look at the diplomatic developments, negotiations on the border line with Iran and contacts with the European Union and various European countries on issues regarding the migration flow are continuing.

Although the issue of Afghans in Turkey is not a new development, it is known that it has been continuing since 1979. In this direction, according to the data of the General Directorate of Migration Management in recent years, a total of 58,647 irregular migrants were caught in the country in 2014, and Afghans with 12,248 people ranked second after Syrians. In the following years, the total number of irregular migrants apprehended increased, reaching 174,466 in 2016, achieving a tremendous acceleration in its growth rate, reaching the highest number of 454,662 in 2019. This number, which reduced significantly in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, decreased to 106,222 people as of September 23, 2021. The biggest factor behind this significant increase is the number of Afghan nationals, surpassing Syrians.

Although the number of irregular Afghan immigrants apprehended, which was 31,360 in 2016, increased to 201,437 in 2019, which decreased to 44,565 as of September 23, 2021, which constitute almost half of the total number. Regarding the total number of Afghans in Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated in his speech on August 20, 2021 that they are close to 300,000. When we look at the general distribution of this number, the majority of Afghans residing in Turkey legally have various residence permits. Among them, as of September 23, 2021, the total number of Afghans in Turkey with residence permit, short-term residence permit and student residence permit is 100,778. In addition to these, 22,606 Afghans applied for international protection by the end of 2020. At this point, Afghans who entered Turkey illegally have the right to apply for international protection if they are caught. By granting international protection status to those whose applications are accepted, can benefit from various rights. In this regard, one of the important issues is that people who receive protection status must reside in the cities they apply for. Therefore, it is known that some Afghans with protection status also live in other cities illegally.

Afghans in Turkey generally live in big cities such as Istanbul and Ankara and in settlements in the west of the country. Among the reasons, it is indicated that there are more opportunities to find work in big cities and for those who are planning to migrate Europe prefers to reside in Western cities due to its geographical closeness. When we look at the sectoral distribution in terms of work, it is stated that in addition to different jobs in the construction sector, cafes and restaurants, and daily work in factories, especially illegal workers show interest in shepherding and other jobs that do not require a work permit.

How the Taliban will take steps regarding the administration of the country in Afghanistan will greatly affect the determination of other countries' attitudes towards the Taliban and the course of the migration wave. However, considering that no major change is expected in the Taliban that governs the country, it is predicted that the influx of migration will continue to increase. In this regard, how widely the Afghanistan-Pakistan-Iran route will be used will also help us to understand the important trends in the migration flow to Turkey. When the duration of the migration journey is taken into account, the arrival of people who have managed to leave Afghanistan to Turkey in about 1-1.5 months will provide us with more concrete information about how big a migration wave we are facing and the effectiveness of the measures being taken.

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## Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan Ruslan Kazakbaev paid an official visit to Italy and participated in the official opening ceremony of the Embassy of Kyrgyzstan in Italy. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy Marina Sereni and leaders of the Kyrgyz diaspora from different cities of Italy, as well as Kyrgyz students, attended the ceremony. Minister Kazakbaev expressed gratitude to the Italian side for their support and assistance in the opening of the Kyrgyz Embassy (Kabar, 10.11.2021).
- The Grand National Assembly (Parliament) of Turkey approved a bill on extending the term of stay of the Turkish military forces in Azerbaijan, which was previously signed by President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Thus, the deployment of Turkish troops in the joint Turkish-Russian monitoring center in Agdam will last for another year. A one-year mandate to send troops to the Turkish Armed Forces in Azerbaijan was previously given by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on November 17, 2020 (Azernews.az, 11.11.2021).
- The Eighth Summit of the Organization of Turkic States was held in Istanbul. The event was attended by the Heads of State of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Hungary. The Summit was dedicated to the theme of "Green Technologies and Smart Cities in the Digital Age" and coincided with the 30th anniversary of the Independence of the Turkic States. During the Summit, the leaders outlined the main priorities of cooperation and emphasized the increasing role and the promising future of the Organization (Turkkon.org, 12.11.2021).
- Islamabad hosted a meeting in "troika plus" format consisting of Pakistan, Russia, China, and the U.S. to discuss the latest situation in Afghanistan. Representatives of these countries held talks with senior Taliban representatives on the sidelines of the meeting and reiterated their expectation that the Taliban will fulfill their commitment to preventing terrorists from using Afghan territory against their neighboring countries and the rest of the world. The participants also demanded that the rest of the world take measures to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and help in the fight against COVID-19 (ASIA-Plus, 12.11.2021).
- Moscow hosted the meeting of the Council of Defense Ministers of the CIS member states. The heads of the military departments exchanged views on the military-political situation in the world and its impact on the security of the member states of the Commonwealth. The participants discussed a complex of issues of developing multilateral cooperation in the field of defense and approved a set of joint measures for 2022 (Tengrinews.kz, 10.11.2021).
- The Foreign Minister of Japan confirmed Japan's intention to sign a peace treaty with Russia. Particularly, Japan is willing to resolve the issue of ownership of four islands of the Kuril Islands archipelago, Kunashir, Iturup, Shikotan, and Habomai. Russia and Japan had previously agreed to accelerate the pace of the peace negotiations on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit held in November 2018 (Aninews.in, 12.11.2021).

## Economy, Finance, and Energy

- Kazakhstan started to produce fuel assemblies for nuclear power plants. This project will allow Kazakhstan to export nuclear fuel and marks a transition to a full production cycle. Kazakhstan plans to supply to China up to 200 tons of fuel with high added value in the form of fuel assemblies. It is important to note that 14% of the world's proven reserves of uranium are located in Kazakhstan (Qazaq TV, 11.11.2021).
- The Ministry of Energy of Uzbekistan recently reported that the productivity of hydroelectric power plants in Uzbekistan fell by 23% due to low water levels and resulted in short-term power cuts in some areas of the country. In 2020 and 2021, the amount of electricity generation dropped to 5 billion kWh against 6.5 billion kWh in 2019. Electricity consumption in Uzbekistan is expected to grow to 110 billion kWh by 2030. Uzbekistan has resumed importing electricity from neighboring Central Asian countries (UzReport, 10.11.2021).
- Economic cooperation between Uzbekistan and Turkey is deepening. According to the Ministry of Transport of Uzbekistan, the countries intend to launch a system enabling the electronic exchange of permit forms for the carriage of goods. Recently, the Ministry of Transport of Uzbekistan organized a test car rally using E-Permit for the first time. The introduction of the e-system would help speed up transport operations and increase trade between the two republics (UzReport, 12.11.2021).
- The wheat harvest in Kyrgyzstan experienced a significant reduction. According to data from the National Statistics Committee of the republic, as of the end of October 2021, the gross harvest of wheat decreased by 42.1% compared to the same period last year. Grain crops (excluding legumes, rice, and buckwheat) were harvested from the area of 574 thousand hectares, which was 0.9% more than on the same date last year. The abnormally high temperatures and the lack of precipitation caused the reduction (Kabar, 13.11.2021).
- Head of the Russian-Kyrgyz Development Fund Artem Novikov announced that Russia's Roseximbank was ready to provide the fund with \$200 million for joint financing of projects during 2022. Novikov added that following the results of the III. Kyrgyz-Russian Business Forum, which took place in Issyk-Kul 2.5 months ago, the first preliminary agreements on the provision of the fund with loans in the amount of about \$100 million had already been signed (Kabar, 10.11.2021).
- According to the Chairman of the Commonwealth of Independent States Executive Committee and the Executive Secretary of the organization Sergei Lebedev, the member states of the CIS may sign the agreement on free trade in services in May 2022. The official noted that the work on the agreement has been going on for nine years since 2012. Sergei Lebedev added that participants of the CIS Heads of Government Council session had stated with satisfaction that this work was practically finished (BelTA, 12.11.2021).

## Society and Culture

- A new international film festival named Korkut Ata was launched in Istanbul. The festival aims to demonstrate the progress made by the Turkic and present cinematic works conveying the cultural codes of the Turkic world to the audience. The Korkut Ata Turkic World Film Festival was organized by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism in cooperation with the International Cinema Association, the Turkic Council, TURKSOY, TRT, Istanbul University, as well as many institutions and organizations (Dailysabah.com, 08.11.2021).
- The Ministries of Foreign Affairs of all Central Asian countries have sent Diplomatic Notes of Endorsement and Support to submit the Green Central Asia plan. This document was developed in accordance with the provisions of the Joint Declaration signed following the high-level conference held in Berlin in 2020 between Germany and Central Asian states. The initiative provides for the intensification of regional political dialogue on issues of the impact of climate change, water resources management, land use, biodiversity, etc. (Avesta.tj, 12.11.2021).
- The UN directly provided \$15 million in funds to the Afghan health system, bypassing the local ministry. \$8 million of these funds went to salaries, and the bulk of the remaining funds went to medical equipment and drugs. The money reached medical workers in 31 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Global Fund, an international health charity, have resumed the implementation of the project, which was funded by the World Bank (Avesta.tj, 11.11.2021).
- According to a recent survey conducted by the Rating Sociological Group, some 62% of Ukrainians support Ukraine's accession to the European Union (EU) and 58% would like their country to join NATO. If a respective referendum were held today, only 32% of respondents would oppose Ukraine's accession to the EU, and 35% would vote against Ukraine's membership in NATO. The survey finds that pro-European sentiments are dominant among residents of the country's western and central regions of the country (Ukrinform.net, 11.11.2021).
- The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) recently allocated an additional \$2.5 million to Uzbekistan as part of the United States administration's comprehensive global response against the COVID-19 pandemic. The USAID will use these additional funds to provide senior-level technical assistance on ensuring the quality of medicines and to address vaccine hesitancy in the country. This brings the total direct help of the U.S. Government to Uzbekistan in its efforts to combat COVID-19 to over \$16 million (The Tashkent Times, 12.11.2021).
- A training campaign for girls on leadership, mentoring and gender equality in Central Asia was held in the Bostanlyk district of the Tashkent region. The event was organized by Uzbek authorities jointly with UNDP, the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, and the UN - Women. The training brought together more than thirty representatives from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. The aim of the training is to develop leadership qualities and potential for more active participation of women in the political, social, and economic life of their countries (Centralasia.news, 11.11.2021).