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Pakistan's Afghan Refugee Dilemma: A Legacy of Broken Promises

Syed Rizwan Haider Bukhari *

PhD Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University, Peshawar
bukharipalmist@gmail.com

Nisar Ahmed Chandio

Head of International Relations Department, Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University,
Lyari, Karachi
nisar.ahmed@bbsul.edu.pk

Rehmat Ullah

PhD IR Scholar, Qurtuba University, (Hayat Abad Campus) Peshawar
rehmatkhan39@yahoo.com

*** Corresponding Author**

ABSTRACT

Meanwhile, Pakistan has been bearing the humanitarian and economic cost of provision of shelter to Afghan refugees for near 50 years. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 led to a mass exodus, and initially international support of Pakistan's efforts grew strong but waned away leaving Pakistan to bear the brunt of unfulfilled obligations by the world. In this research paper we look at the historical context by which Afghan refugees came about in Pakistan, the policy shifts and socio economic impacts experienced by Afghan refugees in exile. The first examines the impact of global politics, security concerns and economic constraints on Pakistan's most recent deportation practices. To assess the long-term implications of this crisis, the study uses qualitative and quantitative methods, including both policy reviews and case studies, statistical data, as well as other factors. The tough lot of Pakistan refugees has been made worse by international neglect in addition to shooing off what the country perceives as geopolitical priorities. At the end of the paper, recommendations on sustainable refugee management are presented, which include that it is time for other global stakeholders to effectively take over and provide for humanitarian protection.

Keywords: Afghan Refugees, Pakistan, Humanitarian Crisis, Policy Shifts, International Responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan has been the front runner of one of the longest-enduring refugee crises in the world for almost five decades. In 1979 the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan started the influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan; millions were pushed south of the border (Hussain, et al., 2023; Hafeez, Iqbal, & Imran, 2021). However, international initial support was strong, but the result of geopolitical interests, and it dwindled over time, leaving Pakistan to cope alone with little help. Afghan refugees have caused socio-economic, political and security implications for Pakistan, today it is faced with the issue of more than 2.8 million Afghan refugees in the country (United Nations High commissioner for refugees (UNHCR, 2023). Historical capital about this past trajectory of emigration and deportations, shifting government policies, of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan and the broader effects of Pakistan's recent deportations are examined in this paper (Khan, & Hassan, 2020; Khan, Sarfraz, & Tabassum, 2020).

Decades of conflict starting with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 have made the Afghan refugee crisis in Pakistan so severe. It prompted one of the biggest forced migrations in modern history, as millions of Afghans sought asylum in neighboring, crisis stricken, Pakistan. At first, in the course of humanitarian assistance, the Pakistani government opened its borders under the UNHCR cooperation and support of Western countries (Hafeez, Khan & Jabeen, 2024; Irshad, Khan & Mahmood, 2024; Khan, Sarfraz & Afzal, 2019). International funding, particularly from the United States was also substantial during the 1980s, since Western powers considered Pakistan to be a vital ally in their broader Cold War plan against the Soviet Union. Financial and military aid flowed into Pakistan, where they claimed to be humanitarian support, through the use of Afghan refugees as a proxy war leverage (Siddiqi, 2022). However, this support was short-lived. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the collapse of the Afghan communist regime, the global focus on Afghan refugees was diverted. Having made significant progress towards its strategic objectives, the international community scaled down on funding and left it for Pakistan to cope with millions of refugees on its own. Since the lack of coordinated repatriation plan, many Afghans were rendered to Pakistan as they integrated into local communities but also placed a burden on living, social and economic (Khan, Hayat, 2021).

However, over the years, Pakistan has stayed proactive in dealing with Afghan refugees; a variable mixture of political and economic and security considerations has influenced Pakistan's stance towards Afghan refugees (Kayani, et al., 2023; Khan, et al., 2021; Naseer, et al., 2021; Khan & Khan, 2020). The government had kept up an open door policy whereby refugees were allowed to go into camps, get aid and move around. But while Pakistan had very rigorous, restrictive policies toward Afghan refugees, its own domestic challenges only increased (Yousaf, 2023), until the late 1990's, when economic pressures mounted and internal instability grew, Pakistan began tightening its refugee policies Akhtar & Kayani, 2024; Akhtar, et al., 2020; Anwar, et al., 2019). The government offered registration programs limiting Afghan refugees' right and classifying them into categories of documented or undocumented migrants. The second turning point was the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. invasion of

Afghanistan that followed under its leadership. Wishing to prosecute the Taliban, Western nations re-engaged with Afghanistan, pressuring Pakistan to return refugees to the country. During this period of 2002 to 2005, more than 3 million Afghans were repatriated although thousands remained, unable to return home because of the ongoing violence and instability in Afghanistan (Rahim, 2020) which had once again changed the rules of engagement for refugee policies in Pakistan. As they faced economic struggles, the rise in security threats and dwindling international aid, Pakistan began to deport the undocumented Afghan refugees in 2023 (Hafeez, Khan & Jabeen, 2024; Irshad, Khan & Mahmood, 2024; Khan, Sarfraz & Afzal, 2019). Alternately, justifications included claiming national security reasons and economic strain, all the while being condemned as a violation of international refugee's protections by human rights organizations (Amnesty International, 2023). Such harsh restrictions on Afghan migrants and abrupt expulsions have made a bad situation worse. Presence of Afghan refugees has been long-term and it has had profound economic and social consequences on Pakistan (Azhar, 2024; Azhar, et al., 2022). Refugees have indeed been part of labor force, most notably in construction, agriculture and informal trade, though their presence has also meant great strain on public resources (Ahmed, 2022). Pakistani government has not been able to afford to provide good healthcare, education and good job opportunities not only to its own citizens but also to the refugee population (Imran, Zaidi, & Rehan, 2024; Imran, Sultana, & Ahmed, 2023).

Infrastructures and urban centers have strained one of the most important challenges. Peshawar, Quetta, Karachi, have, in particular, absorbed huge number of Afghan refugees and most of them are living as squatters in overcrowded already small housing sectors and are competing for fewer jobs (ul Haq, 2019; 2017; ul Haq et al., 2012). Local resentment has been stoked by the fact that Afghan refugees have fueled resentment among some segments of the Pakistani population over the perception they are an economic burden. Anti refugee sentiment has been further increased in the political rhetoric, especially during the periods of economic downturn, (Baloch & Khan, 2022). Refugees also often live in socially and economically segregated areas (Sarfraz, Raja, & Malik, 2022; Raja, Raju, & Raja, 2021; Sarfraz, Raju, & Aksar, 2018). The rules restrict Afghans in Pakistan who do have legal documentation but most of them live here for many decades and they don't have legal documents, so it limits their access to formal employment, to banking services and to own property. According to the Azhar, Iqbal and Imran (2025) establishing a business as well as seeking higher education would have been easier for those who have tried, but the bureaucratic hurdles have prevented them to fully integrate into the Pakistani society (Kakar, 2021). Security concerns have contributed to shaping Pakistan's refugee policies beyond economic considerations. Rising militancy, arms smuggling and cross border terrorism has been equated with the presence of Afghan refugees (Imran, Zaidi, & Rehan, 2024; Imran, Sultana, & Ahmed, 2023). The Soviet Afghan war' also became a recruitment ground of Afghan refugees settling in Pakistan where the mujahideen fighters later grew into extremist groups. Pakistan's political pressure mounts against taking in Afghan refugees; over the years, allegations of militant infiltration within

refugee communities have further strained Pakistan's willingness to accommodate displaced Afghans (Shah, 2023).

Besides, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have long been unpleasant, with successive Afghan governments accusing the country of meddling with its internal politics. Meanwhile, Pakistan has expressed its frustration by Afghanistan's inability to stop militant groups from operating from its soil targeting Pakistan (Irshad, Malik, & Sarfraz, 2023; Malik, Sarfraz, & Seemal, 2021). This in effect, made it a diplomatic challenge for the Afghan refugee issue, and interfering in Pakistan's decision making with regard to repatriation (Gul, 2023). International stakeholders, on the other hand, have also been inconsistent in their role of addressing Pakistan's refugee situation (Fatima, Khan & Kousar, 2024; Huda, Khan & Afzal, 2024; Farooq, et al., 2021). Funding shortfalls have greatly limited the impact of efforts of organizations like the UNHCR to support repatriation. Pakistan finds itself in a difficult position due to the fact that Western nations failed to honour their financial and humanitarian commitments and left Pakistan between geopolitical pressures and the difficult of refugee management (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Afghan refugee problem in Pakistan has been reviewed from historical, economic, social and political perspective. This section examines what has been written about the causes of displacement, long term relationship between Afghan refugees and Pakistani economy and society, and international community's intervention regarding Afghan refugees (Fatima, Khan & Kousar, 2024; Huda, Khan & Afzal, 2024; Farooq, et al., 2021). The results highlight the shortcomings of a global migration governance, insufficient aid delivered through international channels, and the heavy burden that is being placed upon Pakistan's resources (Sarfraz, Raja, & Malik, 2022; Raja, Raju, & Raja, 2021; Sarfraz, Raju, & Aksar, 2018).

Historical Context of Afghan Refugee Migration

One of the biggest refugee crises of the modern age began in 1979 when the Soviet invaded Afghanistan. Millions of Afghans fled into Pakistan within months to war and political instability (UNHCR, 2022). Initially, the United States and its allies gave Pakistan overwhelming aid, but the motivation behind this aid was at least in part due to Cold War geopolitics, not a commitment to refugee welfare (Weiner, 1993). Rubin (2002) stresses that Pakistan supported Afghan refugees as a part of its strategic alignment with the West, but the support was not sustainable in the medium or the long run (Irshad, Malik, & Sarfraz, 2023; Malik, Sarfraz, & Seemal, 2021). Afghan refugees first settled in the border zones between Pakistan and Afghanistan in the camps and, later on, extended into the urban centers of Pakistan integrating into Pakistani society (Koser & Black, 1999). There was a lull in international interest, the financial support, and the resettlement opportunities decreased drastically during the Post-Soviet withdrew era. As such, the Afghan refugee crisis has extremely well followed this pattern of external engagement, followed by abandonment (Shah, et al., 2025; Imran, et al., 2023). Both the rise of the Taliban in mid-1990s and the subsequent U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 marked new out flings of displaced people,

inducing extra strain on Pakistan (Grare & Maley, 2011). In recent years, an increase in refugee arrivals occurred due to Kabul's fall in 2021, but the policies that have followed from Pakistan are a move towards containment and deportation (Ashraf, 2023). These historical shifts emphasize that displacement in Afghanistan is cyclical and there is no durable solution (Khan, Hussain & Ahmad, 2023).

Economic and Social Impact on Pakistan

There has been much debate regarding the economic contributions made by Afghan refugees to Pakistan. Refugees have, on the one hand, contributed to Pakistan's informal economy, (Saba, Fatima, Farooq, & Zafar, 2021; Saba, Tabish, & Khan, 2017) especially in jobs in the labor intensive sectors, such as construction, agriculture and petty trade (Siddiqui, 2019). In Pakistan, it is also noticeable to state that Afghan traders have had a role in cross border trade, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan (Khan & Ali, 2021). But concerns about competing for the resources of the host country have overshadowed the advantages to a nation of refugee labor. An influx on the Afghan refugees have dealt a heavy burden on the local infrastructure and public services (Baloch & Sultana, 2020). Tensions in the cities of Karachi and Peshawar, with local populations well coming to blows with Afghan migrants, is due to competition for jobs and access to services (Malik, 2021). A lack of resources to both refugees and its own citizens is shown in studies that have indicated that the Pakistani government has been unable to set aside enough funding to address these problems (Imran & Akhtar, 2023; Imran, Zaidi, & Khanzada, 2023). Healthcare facilities in refugee dense cities have become overburdened and is not able to provide services for both (Rehman & Yousaf 2022). Legal and financial barriers still leave many Afghan children unable to access formal schooling, and therefore little educational opportunities for the children (Kakar, 2021). It marks a long term consequence for Afghanistan's stability and Pakistan's social cohesion by the lack of investment in refugee education (ul Haq, 2019; 2017; ul Haq et al., 2012). They also had formal marginalization based on the legal and economic status of the majority of Afghan refugees who are in an informal situation (Kayani, et al., 2023; Khan, et al., 2021; Naseer, et al., 2021; Khan & Khan, 2020). Refugees without proper document face difficulty finding stable jobs, opening a bank account or being accessed to government assistance programmes (Koser, 2010). This exclusion has aided and further perpetuated cycles of poverty and vulnerability and made refugees more vulnerable to being exploited and exploited by such criminal networks (Haque, 2022).

International Commitments and Failures

In terms of the global response to Afghan refugees in Pakistan, there has been inconsistency and neglect. While the U.S. and its allies poured tremendous dollar and military aid into Pakistan during the Cold War, an outsized bulk of this aid was used for security goals (and not humanitarian relief) (Weiner, 1993). When the Soviets pulled out, the rest of the world was not paying attention, and they started to drop significantly (UNHCR, 2023). In addition, funding has constrained the role of the UNHCR in supporting Afghan refugees. While the agency has done so far, providing temporary shelter for displaced Afghans (Loescher & Milner, 2005), it has not been able to provide such guaranteed solutions (Malik, et al., 2025; Shah & Saba, 2024). The

donor priorities have been more geared towards rebuilding the region and since 2001, have typically been focusing on helping a host country (Haque, 2022). Resultantly, external support has been minimal on Pakistan to cope up with the crisis. Refugee resettlement of Afghan refugees in third countries has been, on the whole, equally unsuccessful. Even while the nations that ensure regional supply of Afghanistan's conflict have taken in only a small fraction of Afghans seeking asylum (Phulpoto, Oad, & Imran, 2024; Oad, Zaidi, & Phulpoto, 2023). Pakistan has had to adopt restrictive policies towards refugees because of the lack of a coordinated global resettlement strategy (Grare, 2018). Regardless (Saba, Fatima, Farooq, & Zafar, 2021; Saba, Tabish, & Khan, 2017), the recent deportation of undocumented Afghan refugees from Pakistan represents international community's general inability to tackle the crisis adequately. Pakistan's deportation policies have been criticized by human rights organizations, who argue that they go against international refugee protections as enforced by Amnesty International (2023). Yet, the capacity of Pakistan to maintain its refugee population lies seriously short of global stakeholders without financial or logistical support (Khan, & Hassan, 2020; Khan, Sarfraz, & Tabassum, 2020; Khan, Sarfraz, & Tabassum, 2020; Khan, Sarfraz, & Afzal, 2019).

Legal and Humanitarian Challenges

Pakistan's framework for Afghan refugees is criticized as being not clear and consistent. Unlike the States that have ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, Afghanistan is not recognized formally under international refugee law by Pakistan (Khan, 2020). Instead, Afghan migrants are governed by the shifting political considerations and ad hoc policy decisions. The biggest headache is a lack of a formal refugee status determination process. The ones that we classify Afghan refugees in Pakistan as are 'registered' or 'unregistered' and the most vulnerable to arrest and deportation are 'unregistered' (Bhatia 2021). In addition to putting people in dangerous situations of accommodation, those who live in limbo are further restricted on movement, employment and education. Furthermore, reports indicate that Afghan refugees in Pakistan are being harassed, policed and forced off their land (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Without guarantees under the law, refugees have found themselves in legal limbo, at the same time unable to return to Afghanistan and at still not fully capable of blending into Pakistani society.

METHODOLOGY

Present study Pakistan's Afghan refugee crisis, applied qualitative approach. Contains steps of qualitative analysis such as policy reviews, historical accounts, among others; to examine the evolution of refugee policy and socio-political impacts. It is quantitative in that it uses data from UNHCR, Pakistani government reports, economic impact assessments, to measure refugee demographics, the economic contributions and international aid trends. Case studies of Afghan refugee communities in Peshawar, Karachi, and Quetta further offer the insights to the demographic composition, the economic participation, social integration as well as the legal implications This approach allows us to have a complete and data driven evaluation of policies that Pakistan has for refugees, as well as their long term

implication.

DISCUSSION

There are a lot of political decisions, economic stress, security threats, through changing international priorities which are affecting in an Afghan refugee crisis in Pakistan. Pakistan's decision to send back the undocumented Afghan refugees had drawn the debate all over the world, but the economic burden and the security risks have compelled the government to look afresh at its refugee policies (Kayani, et al., 2023; Khan, et al., 2021; Naseer, et al., 2021; Khan & Khan, 2020). The factors that have been driving Pakistan's changing position, the economic consequences, the security angles, and the response of the international community toward this crisis are examined in this section.

Pakistan's Policy Shift Towards Deportation

In 2023, economic strain, security risks and the need to maintain national stability led to a shift of policy on the part of Pakistan, which was seeking to deport undocumented Afghan refugees (Government of Pakistan, 2023). One reason for this decision was that the domestic pressures were mounting: inflation was on the rise, joblessness was increasing and anti-refugee sentiment was growing. Deportation is also a result of Pakistan's national security (Khan, Hussain & Ahmad, 2023). Some Afghan refugees have been involved in militant activities, illegal trade, smuggling networks (Rana, 2021). However, international governments have censored this policy, critics state that forced deportations are in violation of refugee protection agreements, most particularly the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol (Amnesty International, 2023). In addition, de facto deportation measures that have forced the displacement of thousands of Afghan families, the majority of which have resided in Pakistan for decades, have been imposed against dozens of thousands of Afghan families. It has been reported that the deportees do not have proper mechanism for resettlement and will be at risk of persecution, economic instability and displacement on returning back to Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2023). While Pakistan continues to bear the burden of this refugees, there is no legalese way for a long term Afghan refugee to become a permanent resident or citizens of this country, hence it is a resented issue with no end in sight (Hussain, 2023).

Economic Strain on Pakistan

The hosting of Afghan refugees has further increased the fiscal cost of hosting Afghan refugees in Pakistan. However, the government allocates substantial resources for refugee management in the areas of housing, food subsidies, a health service and education (Malik, et al., 2025; Shah & Saba, 2024). According to the World Bank (2022), annually, Pakistan has to spend more than \$1 billion in refugee allowance and recklessly cloy the country's balance sheet. Some insist that refugees represent an inflow of money and play a role in agriculture, trade and informal labor markets, while others claim that their arrivals are taking food off the table of already scarce resources (Azhar, 2024; Azhar, et al., 2022). It is because refugees live in low income areas where the demand for such things like, house, medical care and education surpass the available supply (Siddiqui, 2019). Pakistan's poor economic situation has only been

made worse by record-high inflation and already low foreign exchange reserves, making the continued burden for refugee support seem intolerable (Rehman, 2023). Others argue that it is a permissible direction of national resources to shift investment in economic recovery for the good times of the nation rather than a legacy of unmanageable refugee population in the country. Yet research shows that the long term economic benefits tied up in well integrating refugees into the formal economy through legal work permits and organised resettlement programs do indeed pay for themselves (Javed & Ahmed, 2021). Despite the absence of the policies of economic integration, instability persists among Afghan refugees and host communities in particular cases of urban centers where the lack of jobs and state services competes.

Security Concerns and Geopolitical Influence

Pakistan's refugee policies regarding Afghans have reflected the vital role that the national security concerns of Pakistan have played in shaping them. In the last few years authorities have stated that undocumented Afghan migrants have linked them to cross border militancy, corruption and smuggling networks (Rana, 2021). In the past century, when the borders remained laxer with unregulated movement, terror financing, weapons smuggling, and illicit trade became so common. However, the Taliban's overtake of Afghanistan in 2021 has made Pakistan's security dynamics even more complex (Imran, et al., 2023; Ahmed, Ahmed & Buriro, 2023). Initially, Pakistan and Taliban maintained diplomatic relationship but this relationship soured over border security issues and the activities of terrorist in Pakistan (Hussain, 2023). However, the fact that the terrain along the border remains hospitable to militant factions that cause terrorist attacks within Pakistan, adds to the threat of such attacks within Pakistan itself. A counterterrorism strategy of deportations, border fortifications, intelligence operations and higher security measures is part of what the government is doing. But strained relations between Islamabad and Kabul furthered, as the Taliban accused Pakistan of unfairness towards Afghan nationals (Rehman, 2023). In addition, India, China and Russia are regional powers that also indirectly affect the nature of Pakistan's security against Afghan refugees. Related to this, India has criticised Pakistan's treatment of Afghanistan foreign refugees who have found refuge in Pakistan during the years and accused Pakistan of political opportunism (Javed & Ahmed, 2021). ul Haq (2019), stated such geopolitical interplay is at play in Pakistan's decision making as the country attempts to balance its strategic alliance with India and domestic security priorities.

International Response and Neglect

The global response to Pakistan's Afghan refugee crisis has been inadequate, there is declining international aid and very little burden sharing initiatives. In the early times, the United States, UNHCR and EU countries (nations) provided large amounts of refugee aid to Pakistan initially, especially during the Cold War and post September 11 era. But over the last two decades, international funding has increasingly been funneled toward Afghanistan's internal reconstruction projects, with little help from the outside (UNHCR, 2023). But then the United States, a major donor, saw the reduction in humanitarian aid while emphasis has been given on security and counter terrorism in the region (Haque, 2022). In European countries, the initiatives taken to

accommodate refugees have reduced; in fact, scarcely any European countries are helping Pakistan to cope with their own anti-migrant crisis (Javed & Ahmed, 2021). Various education, healthcare, and legal aid programs have been affected by the decline of the UNHCR's budget for Afghan refugees in Pakistan (World Bank, 2022). Over the years, Pakistan has been appealing to the international community to adopt collective approach towards the Afghan refugee crisis (Khan, & Hassan, 2020; Khan, Sarfraz, & Tabassum, 2020; Khan, Sarfraz, & Tabassum, 2020; Khan, Sarfraz, & Afzal, 2019). Yet, far from these responses being anything substantive, they have been symbolic in nature and lacked any significant financial or policy commitments (Rehman, 2023). Pakistan has been forced to take unilateral actions such as deportations and restrictions on cross border travel due to the lack of a coordinated refugee resettlement strategy. Experts have argued that if a solution is to be sustainable then it will involve shared responsibility, wherein wealthy countries take in more Afghan refugees or offer long-term financial aid to host countries (Hussain, 2023). Unless severe policy actions and international cooperation are taken, Pakistan will remain disproportionately othered into a long-term refugee crisis (Akhtar & Kayani, 2024; Akhtar, et al., 2020; Anwar, et al., 2019).

Discussion explores multiple aspects of Pakistan's challenge to deal with Afghan refugees are highlighted. Shifts in policy have been dictated by economic burden, security threats, political pressures, beg the question to the detriment of human beings, installations and the Iraqis" and this has led to deportations and restrictive measures. Pakistan justifies its actions on the basis of economic constraints and any national security concerns arising from the conflict, yet humanitarian consequence lasts for a long time (Ahmad, et al., 2021; Ali, et al., 2020; Ahmad, 2018). The Pakistan crisis has been aggravated with collapsing refugee aid and little global resettlement action. If global stakeholders do not share the burden of this humanitarian and geopolitical dilemma, then the issue will remain as a premier issue for Pakistan. For long term stability, a balanced economic sustainability, security measures and humanitarian considerations approach is key.

Findings

Evidence shows that the Afghan refugee crisis in Pakistan exists on multiple levels between social, economic and political and humanitarian factors. These findings present a thorough understanding of the different factors that made Pakistan deal with continuous refugee management issues throughout history. For decades Pakistan sustained Afghan refugees yet it still faces problems while performing its humanitarian duties while attending to national security and economic affairs. The demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of Afghan refugees in Pakistan highlight their status as one of the largest and longest-standing refugee communities in the world. As of 2023, UNHCR estimates that Pakistan hosts approximately 4.4 million Afghan refugees, both registered and undocumented (UNHCR, 2023). Most Afghan refugees settled in urban areas including Peshawar, Karachi and Quetta but some refugees reside in refugee camps within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. The arrival of Afghan refugees has produced diverse economic and social effects throughout Pakistan's territory (Rehan, et al., 2024; Ahmad, et al., 2024). The refugee

communities participate in the unregulated economy of Pakistan through jobs in construction fields with roles in farming operations as well as trade businesses. Opportunities to participate in the economy have raised competition levels between refugees and host citizens although this has sometimes triggered strained relationships between both parties (Siddiqui et al., 2023). Many refugee offspring face restricted access to official education and insufficient healthcare because limited funds and strained public infrastructure capabilities (Khan et al., 2023).

The country of Pakistan assumes maximum financial responsibility after being designated as the principal host nation. National finances suffer through heavy government expenses targeting refugee care across education, healthcare and safety and social service sectors particularly in refugee-dense areas (Haque et al., 2022). The influx of Afghan refugees creates housing scarcity and increases the cost of food along with taxing municipal service capacities throughout major cities starting from Peshawar and Quetta. The country's extended refugee policy sustainability along with public discontent about refugee-hosting expenses are major domestic issues that stem from these issues (Rehman et al., 2023). Various financial burdens alongside administrative difficulties have not prevented Afghan refugees from making significant economic contributions to Pakistan. The refugee population has built several small businesses to become important workers in industries that rely heavily on manual labor. Extensive regional commerce expansion by Afghan traders together with market fortification has been noticed mainly in border regions (Javed & Ahmed, 2021).

The lack of formal work permits together with insufficient legal protections obstruct Afghan immigrants from accessing the formal economy. Multiple studies indicate Afghan refugees experience insecure jobs that pay low wages and deny their right to protection at work (Asif et al., 2023). The results of this research indicate that Pakistan should review its refugee policies to establish better organizing principles for long-term solutions. The absence of enduring legal guidelines regarding Afghan refugees has generated continuous uncertainties which harms refugees alongside local populations. Afghan refugees stay in legal ambiguity because there are no official channels to obtain permanent residency or citizenship status which exposes them to deportation threats and policy changes (Hussain 2023).

Most countries of the international sphere have shown poor commitment to the required responsibility of sharing Afghan refugee burdens. During the Cold War together with the post-9/11 period Pakistan obtained major financial support from the U.S. and Western nations however their economic contributions mostly targeted military operations while skipping sustained refugee relief (UNHCR, 2023). International funding for Afghan refugees located in Pakistan has experienced a substantial decrease because world support now centers on Afghanistan's domestic reconstruction more than supporting Pakistan-type host countries (International Crisis Group, 2023). The insufficient extended financial backing has compelled Pakistan to handle refugee management with constrained outside backing. The international community failed to respond to calls advocating global burden-sharing so Pakistan now faces only two choices to handle its refugee crisis by fortifying border

security and managing deportation procedures for undocumented Afghan refugees (Azhar, 2024; Azhar, et al., 2022). The widespread deportation of Afghan refugees has attracted condemnation from human rights parties and international observers because it breaches international refugee protection rules while endangering defenseless refugee groups (Amnesty International, 2023). The analysis demonstrates Pakistan's refugee policies evolved based on changing geopolitical priorities of regional powers. The earlier positive view of Afghan refugees by Pakistan during the Soviet invasion came from its political ties with America and Western countries yet its policies now adjust due to shifting regional circumstances.

Pakistan confronts new obstacles in refugee management after the Taliban's return to power in 2021 because border safety concerns together with diplomat tensions and cross-border militant activities have become more intense (Rana, 2021). Pakistan's vulnerable situation with economic problems and security threats together with decreasing international assistance has led to its growing restrictions on refugee policies. More public agreement exists about Afghan refugees causing economic instability which produces increased government pressure to force them to return. Politicians disagree about the validity of resource divesture for home economic recovery versus the human rights issues that would stem from Taliban refugee force-outs without proper reintegration framework in Afghanistan according to Rehman (2023).

A thorough refugee policy needs to develop by combining economic security measures with provisions for humanitarian protection alongside national defense concerns. The long-term response for Afghan refugees requires granting legal work permits while creating ordered resettlement initiatives and enhanced global support for Pakistani refugee efforts. Pakistan's Afghan refugee crisis demands both coordination and sustainability to avoid continuing economic, social and geopolitical difficulties. The research demonstrates that refugees require immediate reconsideration of their management policies by international and domestic authorities. A sustainable refugee relief solution needs collective global participation because wealthier countries must actively do resettlements and offer major financial support to host countries. Pakistan faces a lasting economic challenge because it bears an unbalanced refugee cost which began half a century ago unless significant policy changes along with cooperation from other nations become reality.

CONCLUSION

The Afghan refugee crisis in Pakistan evolves as a complex humanitarian systematic that has existed for forty-five years. International support initially funded the challenges but fell away when Pakistan started facing the entire monetary strain itself. The combination of economic problems and security worries and growing anti-refugee opinions has prompted the implementation of controversial deportation policies but these actions violate human rights. The undocumented economic activities of Afghan refugees fail to guarantee their inclusion because Pakistan lacks programs for their legal integration. World countries have shown insufficient support through their limited funding and small-scale resettlement aid. A long-lasting

resolution needs international sharing of burdens combined with balanced national approaches and social-economic integration plans. The ongoing crisis worsens both national stability in Pakistan and regional instability because of a lack of global cooperation. A lasting humane resolution stands essential for resolving this emergency along with securing stability between both Pakistan and Afghan refugees.

Policy Recommendations and Future Prospects

The solution for Pakistan's Afghan refugee crisis demands a thorough approach which unites security protection with human aid responsibility. The following policy recommendations outline a method to manage refugees sustainably by meeting both country demands together with international commitment requirements.

Strengthening International Cooperation

Extra financial backing should come from UNHCR and the EU and Western countries towards Pakistan's refugee programs that provide stable housing support alongside healthcare and educational services. The governments of Pakistan and Iran and Afghanistan must collaborate through a unified refugee framework which directs voluntary return operations while offering reintroduction programs and distributes responsibility duties. Western countries should create expanded resettlement programs which would help Pakistani refugees migrate to third-party nations and establish lasting security for displaced people population.

Legal and Policy Reforms for Pakistan

A formal legal process for Afghan refugees to establish permanent residency would enable work rights which would reduce unlawful employment and change the economic stress pattern. Pakistan should strengthen its security procedures by utilizing intelligent-based monitoring systems to track refugee movements while never implementing universal refugee expulsion programs that infringe upon international protections. The government must improve its refugee policies to protect rights and maintain security through clear national legislation consistent with global refugee conventions.

Enhancing Humanitarian and Economic Integration

Through vocational education together with education programs and employment initiatives for Afghan refugees the government can achieve two strategic outcomes: self-sufficiency and economic independence. The integration of Afghan refugees depends on public awareness campaigns which combine community outreach and media efforts and local development programs to build better connections between refugees and local residents. Extra funding dedicated toward public welfare should be provided to the reception areas to prevent economic stress on host populations and ensure they share equally in assistance and infrastructure growth benefits.

Sustainable Repatriation and Reintegration Support

The successful return of Afghan refugees in stable conditions to their home country requires designed programs that offer housing services and employment opportunities and social support for reintegration. Backed by global support and the Afghan government must develop economic prospects for refugees who return home in order to stop more population movements away from their country. Through their

implementation Pakistan can improve management of Afghan refugees and protect both security interests and economic stability and humanitarian commitments. Effective sustainability demands equal treatment together with international cooperation among strong worldwide partnerships.

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