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Refugee movement and development – Afghan refugees in Iran

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The increasing discussion of the relationship between migration and development attention is focused almost entirely on voluntary migration. Little attention is given to the development of consequences and potential of forced migration. Yet, forced migration, especially refugees, makes up a significant proportion of international moves, most of it being south-south in nature. While the *raison d'être* of forced migration is fleeing persecution and seeking refuge from it, the migration can have important economic outcomes. This paper addresses this issue by examining the educational and occupational outcomes of Afghan refugees in Iran. There is significant upward mobility among the refugees, especially between the first and second generations. It is argued that this represents potential for facilitating development.

Keywords: forced migration; development; Afghan refugees; education and employment; Iran

Introduction

In the burgeoning literature on migration and development much of the attention both among researchers and policy makers focuses, at least implicitly, on movements out of low income countries where migrants move voluntarily. Yet, forced migration is of major significance in low income countries (United Nations High Commission for Refugees [UNHCR], 2012a). Understandably there is a focus on concerns for the rights and security of those who are forced to move but it is also relevant to ask whether migration can not only be a strategy to cope with threats to safety but also whether there can be positive development outcomes for the forced migrants themselves, both in their destinations and their origin countries. Attention is concentrated on whether or not asylum seekers claiming refugee status are in fact 'economic' migrants seeking an avenue for entry to a country rather than the economic effects of the migration remain little investigated. This is the area in which the present paper seeks to make a contribution by examining the experience of Afghan refugees in Iran.

Afghanistan is currently the source of one in four refugees recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR, 2012a) and it is also one of the world's least developed nations. The Human Development Report of 2011 (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2011) puts Afghanistan Human Development Index at 0.398, positioning it at 172 out of 187 countries. The Islamic Republic of Iran is the second largest destination of refugees fleeing Afghanistan and ranks within the world's middle income

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nations (Ratha, Mohapatra, & Silwal, 2011). While Iran functions as a country of first refuge for people fleeing from Afghanistan, in fact the majority remain in Iran for a long period. Indeed a second generation of children born to Afghan refugees in Iran now outnumbers the Afghanistan-born community (Abbasi-Shavazi & Sadeghi, 2011). This paper uses Iranian census data and other information to assess the extent to which Afghan refugees are able to improve their situation with respect to education and occupation and some of the implications which flow from this.

Forced migrants and development

It is possible to view the forced migration-development nexus from three perspectives. On the one hand, many forced migrants spend considerable periods at, or even settle permanently, either in their country of asylum or a third country of resettlement; so it is possible to assess the extent to which they experience an improvement in their living standards in those places. On the other hand, it is possible to investigate the extent to which they exert a positive development influence on their origin countries through remittances and other positive diaspora impacts (Global Commission on International Migration, 2005; United Nations, 2006; World Bank, 2006). Moreover, their economic impact on development in destination countries can be assessed through investigating their economic engagement in those contexts. The particular focus of the present paper is on the extent to which forced migrants are able to improve their lives in destination societies.

Forced international movements have a number of features which distinguish them from other migrations. For example:

- They are usually unplanned so there is a sudden ‘uprootedness’ dimension.
- They are unable to take with them all or most of their accumulated resources.
- Movement is frequently associated with violence, torture and denial of human rights.

One of the most significant elements, however, was recognised in the classic work of Kunz (1973, 1981) in his development of a theory of refugee migration depicted diagrammatically in Figure 1. He explains that whereas other migrants often are able to move directly from their

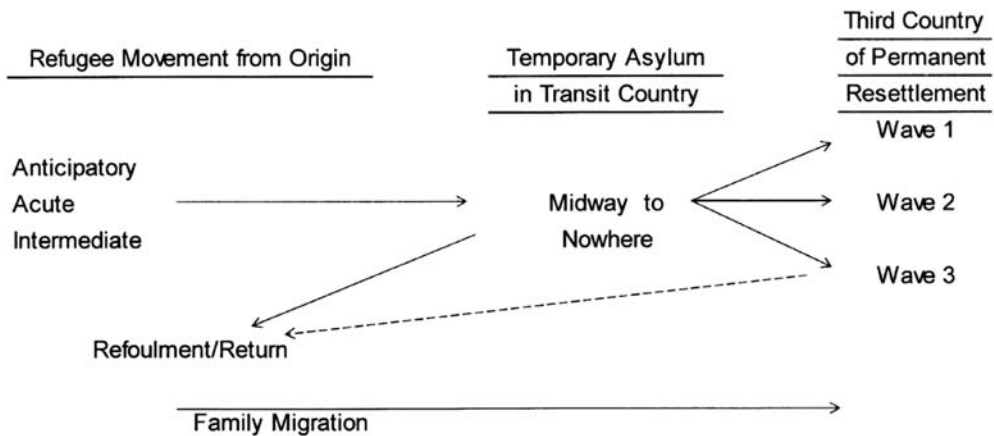


Figure 1. Expansion of Kunz (1973) and Kunz (1981) model of refugee movement. Source: Developed from Kunm Kunz (1973, 1981).

homeland to their planned destination, refugees usually are forced to flee to a place of temporary asylum, often in a neighbouring country. He describes this as a ‘midwhere to nowhere’ situation where those who flee are dominated by uncertainty, often in temporary shelters of one kind or another, are unsure of their future and whether they will be able to return to their homeland or to be resettled in a third country. The reality, however, is that many are stranded in their country of transit, unable to return to their homeland because of continuing insecurity, while not being able to get a place in a permanent resettlement country. In 2011, there were more than 800,000 new refugees across international boundaries recognised by the UNHCR but only around 79,800 places available for permanent resettlement in third countries, so that the majority are forced to remain in a transit country (UNHCR, 2012a).

The contemporary reality is that most refugee migration is south-south in nature with low and middle income countries being both the major countries of origin of refugees and of destination. This is evident in Figure 2 which depicts the distribution of persons identified as refugees by the UNHCR in 2011 (UNHCR, 2012a). Table 1 shows that in 2011, 81.5% of all persons recognised as refugees by the UNHCR in 2011 were in countries classified by the World Bank as low or medium income. Moreover, 99.1% of all refugees originated from low or middle income countries. High income countries remain the major countries which accept refugees for permanent resettlement or a durable solution. However, of the 22 resettlement countries which have indicated to the UNHCR that they would accept refugees in transit/asylum situations, 76,800 persons (96.2%) were resettled in the USA, Canada, Australia, Sweden and Norway (UNHCR, 2012a). The reality then is that refugees are often trapped in a ‘midwhere to nowhere’ situation in low or middle income transit countries. Moreover, it is apparent that refugees often spend extended periods in these contexts. The UNHCR has classified 68.3% of global refugees in 2011 as being in protracted refugee situations where 25,000 or more refugees of the same nationality have been in exile for five years or longer. The

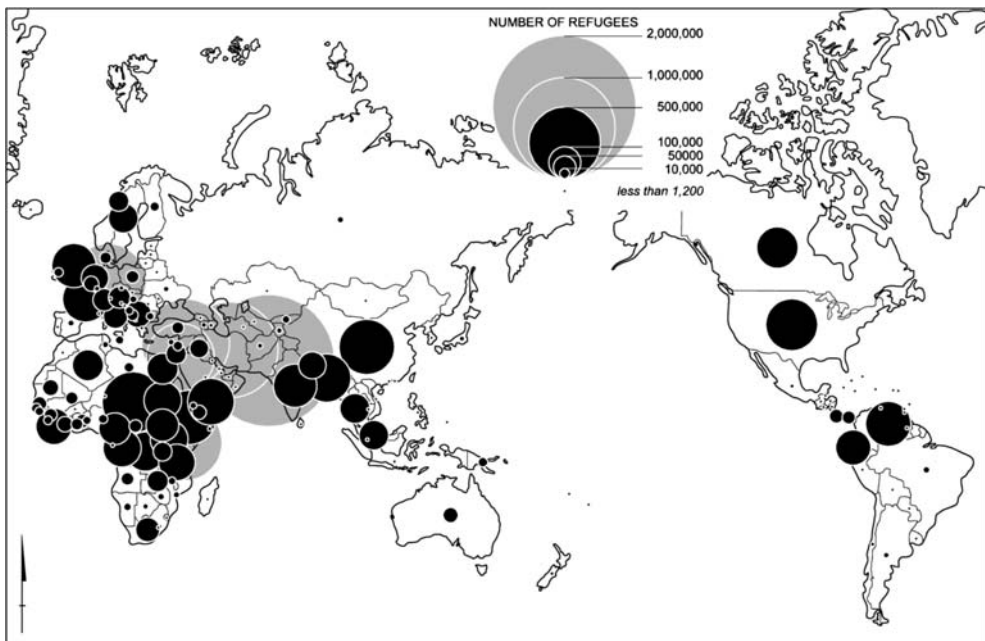


Figure 2. Total refugees and people in refugee-like situations by country of Asylum at end of 2011. Source: UNHCR (2012a, 38–41).

Table 1. Refugees and people in refugee-like situations by country of origin and destination according to World Bank classification.

Nations classified according to World Bank classification	Number in destination				Number by origin*			
	Refugees		Countries		Refugees		Countries	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Low income	2,317,867	22.3	35	18.9	5,290,170	51.7	37	18.2
Medium income	6,154,695	59.2	96	51.9	4,858,887	47.4	106	52.2
High income	1,932,244	18.6	54	29.2	92,529	0.9	60	29.6
Total	10,404,806	100.0	185	100.0	10,241,586	100.0	203	100.0

Source: UNHCR (2012a).

Note: *Excludes stateless and various.

UNHCR established in 2011 that 7.1 million of the world's 10.4 million refugees were in this situation in 26 host countries (UNHCR, 2012a, 12). It is important, therefore, that the experience of refugees in this context is examined.

The issue of the extent to which refugees are able to improve their economic situation in destination contexts has attracted increasing attention among both policy makers and researchers (Connor, 2010; Fix, 2007). However, these research works are located almost entirely in high-income third countries of resettlement like Canada (Couton & Gaudet, 2008) and Australia (Colic-Peisker, 2009; Hugo, forthcoming). While this research is important, resettled refugees in third countries are only a small proportion of the total. The numbers of refugees who are in extended 'temporary settlement' situations in lower, and middle, income transit countries is significantly larger than those in third countries of permanent resettlement but little is known about whether or not they are able to improve their economic situation in those contexts. This paper seeks to make a contribution in this area by examining the situation of refugees from Afghanistan in Iran.

Afghans' forced migration to Iran

There is a long history of migration from Afghanistan to Iran. Shia Afghans have been making religious pilgrimages to Iran for centuries and economically motivated migrations have also been significant. There has been permanent settlement of Afghans into neighbouring parts of Iran recorded since the 1850s. However, the modern history of Afghan immigration to Iran began in 1979 after which most of the movement has been associated with the direct effects of war and insecurity as well as their indirect effects like unemployment and inflation. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989 saw a massive exodus of 3 million Afghans into neighbouring Iran. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the resistance movement assuming power in Kabul, 1.4 million Afghans returned home. However, a civil war in Afghanistan between 1989 and 1993 resulted in a new wave of forced migration to Iran, involving especially the educated, urban middle class. The repressive rule of the Taliban and fighting between the Taliban and opposition groups set off further migration to Iran (Abbasi-Shavazi, Glazebrook, Mahmoudian, Jamshidiha, & Sadeghi, 2005). With the fall of the Taliban in 2004, there was some repatriation, but continued fighting has seen a continuation of the flow to Iran. Moreover, this flow has become more complex, not only involving refugees but also labour migrants. The existence and growth of a well-established substantial Afghan community in Iran has facilitated the development of social networks along which new migrants from Afghanistan have moved.

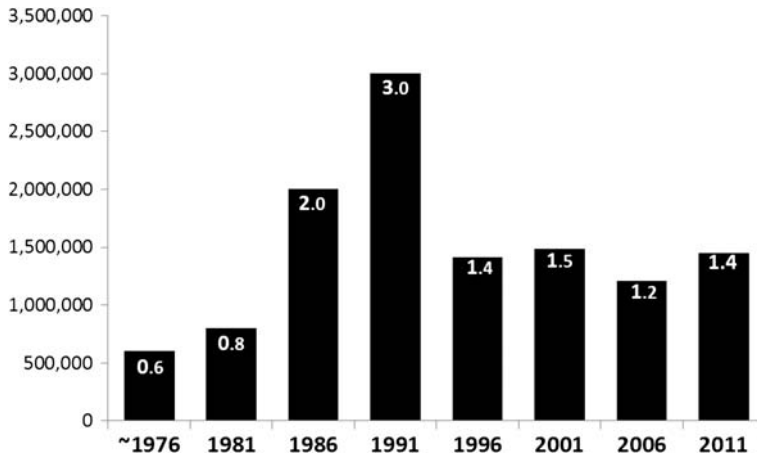


Figure 3. Stock of Afghan immigrants in Iran, 1976–2011.
Source: Based on Iranian censuses 1976–2011.

Accordingly, at the time of the 2006 Iranian population census, of 1.3 million registered foreign nationals, some 96% were from Afghanistan. Figure 3 shows the numbers of registered Afghan foreign nationals at Iranian censuses since 1976. In 2011 the official figure was 1.4 million but it is estimated that the actual numbers of Afghans including undocumented migrants is around 2.5 million. The UNHCR (2012a) reports that in 2011 Afghanistan had the largest number of recognised refugees of any nation in the world with 2.7 million in 79 countries.

The fact that there has been a continuous, albeit episodic, influx of refugees from Afghanistan to Iran over the last three decades and only limited on-migration to other destinations and return to Afghanistan has meant that there has been a chance for a significant second generation Afghan community to develop. In fact, of the 1.2 million documented persons of Afghan nationality enumerated in the 2006 population census in Iran around half were born in Iran (Abbasi-Shavazi & Sadeghi, 2011). Figure 4 shows that the second generation are overwhelmingly in the younger age groups. In examining the economic impacts of Afghan refugee migration it is important to consider the intergenerational effects as well as those among the refugees themselves.

Much of the literature on migration and development concentrates on south–north countries directed at high income countries. However, there is a growing recognition that south–south migration is greater in scale and also has important implications for migration and development. Iran is classified by the World Bank as a middle income country while Afghanistan is emphatically a low income nation. Table 2 indicates that income levels are more than 10 times higher in Iran. Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world where fertility is more than three times higher than Iran and mortality levels three times lower. It has been estimated that 40% of the workforce in Afghanistan is jobless (Overfield & Zumot, 2010, 1). Afghanistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. After three decades of war and the extremes of the Taliban regime, the education sector in Afghanistan has been beset with severe problems. Only 28.7% of the population over 15 years old are able to read and write – the sixth worst in the world. The Afghanistan government launched a ‘Back to School’ campaign in 2002 with the assistance of UNICEF. As a result, there was a dramatic increase in enrolments in primary school from 550,000 in 2001 to 3.9 million in 2004, placing a great strain on the availability of qualified teachers (Abbasi-Shavazi, Mahmoudian, Farjadi, Glazebrook & Sadeghi, 2006).

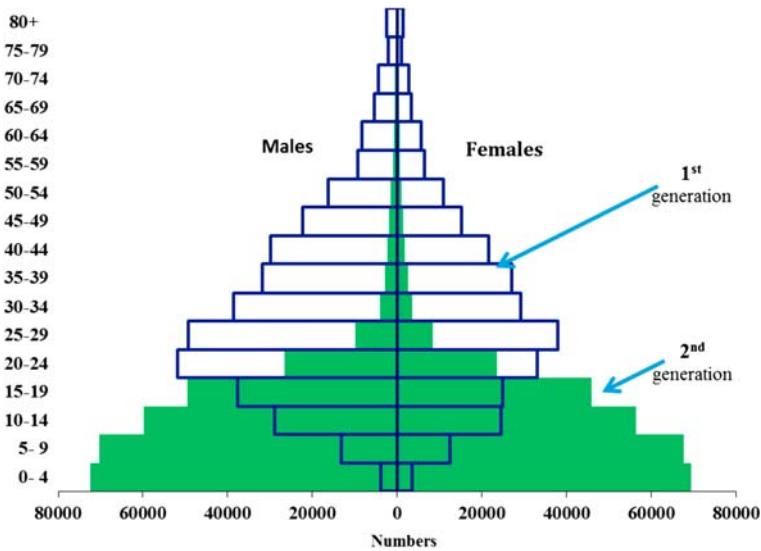


Figure 4. Age–sex composition of the first and second generation registered Afghan nationals in Iran, 2006.

Source: Based on Iranian census 2006.

Table 2. Afghanistan and Iran: demographic and social indicators.

	Afghanistan	Iran
Population (millions) 2012	33.4	74.5
GNI PPP per capita (US\$) 2010	1060	11490
Population living below national poverty line (%)	36.0 (2008)	18.7 (2007)
Gross secondary school enrolment ratio, 2011	Males 58.0 Females 28.0	85.0 81.0
Population with at least secondary education (% aged 25 and older) 2010	Males 34.0 Females 5.8	57.2 39.0
Infant mortality rate, 2012	129.0	21.0
Total fertility rate, 2012	6.2	1.9
% employed in agriculture	69.6 (2004)	24.7 (2005)
Literacy rate, population aged 15 and over	28.1 (2000)	77.0 (2002)

Source: Population Reference Bureau (2012); UNDP (2011); Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [ESCAP], (2011, 2012); Asian Development Bank, (2012); Central Intelligence Agency, (2012); Iran 2010 census (for Population of Iran), 2011 Iran Multiple Indicator DHS (IMR in Iran).

Despite improvements over the last decade, education levels remain very low in Afghanistan, placing a considerable constraint on development efforts. Accordingly, the majority of Afghan workers are in low-skilled occupations. The workforce in Afghanistan is overwhelmingly agricultural and low-skilled. Low levels of human capital along with chronic insecurity are major challenges to development.

In this paper, we use aggregate and micro data from the Iranian census of 2006 to examine the educational and occupational engagement of Afghans in Iran, and to investigate the extent to which there is improvement in their situation. The data only include registered foreign nationals detected at the census and while they are not all persons recognised by the UNHCR as refugees, the movement of the majority has been to some extent influenced by

war and insecurity in Afghanistan. There is an element of force in most of the mobility from Afghanistan to Iran although it is a mixed migration.

Education of Afghans in Iran

Iranian educational policy toward Afghan refugees has fluctuated with changes in government attitudes toward the influx of refugees. Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Iran adopted an ‘open door’ refugee policy granting asylum to Afghans on a *prima facie* basis, considering them ‘religious migrants’. This coincided with the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Islamic principle enshrined in the Qur’an of hosting refugees and displaced persons was respected. At this time Afghan refugees were granted access to education on the same basis as Iranian nationals, although enrolment was not compulsory.

After 1993, however, Iran’s policy toward Afghan refugees changed and they were no longer given the special status of ‘religious migrants’ (Glazebrook & Abbasi-Shavazi, 2007) and issued with temporary registration cards. As Rajaei (2000, 44) points out:

In the 1990s, refugee policy towards Afghans shifted to emphasise prevention of illegal entry and repatriation of Afghan refugees because of domestic, economic and social concerns.

In 2003, the government of Iran signed a revised Tripartite Agreement with the government of Afghanistan and the UNHCR to facilitate voluntary return of Afghans. As a result Iran, in the 1990s, started to incrementally reduce services to Afghans, particularly educational and medical services. As a result many Afghan children were unable to continue their education in Iranian schools.

The number of Afghan students in Iranian schools over the 1991–2006 period is shown in Figure 5 and indicates that there has been a number of fluctuations. This has been due to the complex effects of waves of Afghan migration to Iran and waves of repatriation, changing Iranian policy toward Afghan migration and migrants and shifting attitudes among Afghan refugees regarding education. It should be noted, however, that NGOs have also played a role among Afghan refugees in providing access to education. For example, the Literacy Movement Organisation (LMO) provided literacy classes to 752,374 Afghan refugees over

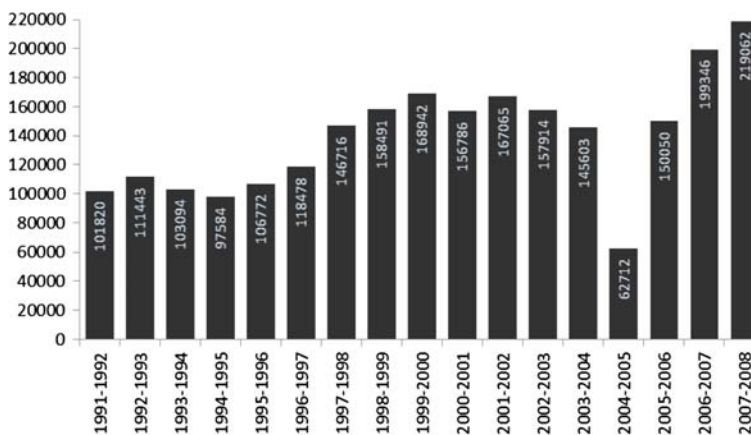


Figure 5. Number of Afghan students in Iran, 1991–2008.
Source: Bureau of International Scientific Cooperation (BICS, 2008).

the 1984–2005 period.¹ The LMO also provided vocational skills training to Afghan refugees for income-generating purposes.

One important development has been the development of Afghan Self Regulated Schools (ASRS) outside of the Iranian government system. These schools were established by the Afghan community in response to the Iranian government legislating to preclude ‘undocumented’ Afghan children from state-run schools. The earliest were established during 1983–1984 in the suburb of Golsher in the city of Mashad. These earliest schools and their founders were supported by the Iranian government. A second generation of schools, however, arose in the 1990s as a result of the introduction of legislation prohibiting ‘undocumented’ Afghans from attending state-run schools.

These schools offer basic education facilities and services, and do not receive funding from the Iranian government or international NGOs. Their curriculum and resource materials, however, are aligned with the mainstream Iranian system. Enrolment in those schools requires no documentation but they suffer from a number of disadvantages compared with state schools. These include substandard facilities, use of untrained teachers, poor administration and wide age ranges within individual classes. Much of the teaching is done by refugees themselves. The students in the schools include:

- Children of undocumented Afghans not permitted to enrol in state-run schools.
- Children who have relevant ID documents but whose parents are absent.
- Children whose education has been delayed so they are too old for junior classes.
- Children of large families who cannot afford the school fees of state-run schools (US \$28 compared with US\$167 – Wickramasekara, Sehgal, Mehran, Noroozi, & Eisazade, 2006, 42).
- Children whose education qualifications are not recognised in the Iranian state school system.

In 2002, in response to the huge increase in ASRS, the Iranian Ministry of Education approached the Embassy of Afghanistan in Tehran to invite their involvement in maintaining the schools and standardising qualifications. As a result, regulations were introduced formulating a constitution for ASRS schools, education background prerequisites for teachers, distribution of resources, monitoring of examinations and reporting. Qualifications obtained in Afghan schools were considered valid up to the second grade of secondary school and, after this level, students needed to sit a special examination to gain access to higher education. While officially the qualifications are not recognised in practice, they are accepted in many contexts in Iran.

Ironically, in 2002, the Iranian government declared ASRS illegal because they encouraged Afghans to remain in Iran. Implementation of the order to close down schools, however, has varied from one area to another, depending on the relationship between local officials and the Afghan community. Moreover, the Afghan community has resisted these efforts to close down schools by shifting to new locations and replacing large schools with a proliferation of smaller schools.

Little is known about the numbers of ASRS, but in 2005–2006 it is estimated that there were around 350 such schools in Tehran province alone, servicing around 100,000 students. Schools varied in size from 1,500 students to enrolments of around 130 in the smaller schools.

What has been the impact of this activity? Data from the 2006 Iranian national census allows us to compare the impact of ASRS and the Iranian government’s efforts on Afghan education on education levels of first and second generation Afghan nationals in Iran with Iranian natives. Figure 6 presents some of these comparisons. There is a clear progression with Iranian natives having the highest literacy rates and first generation

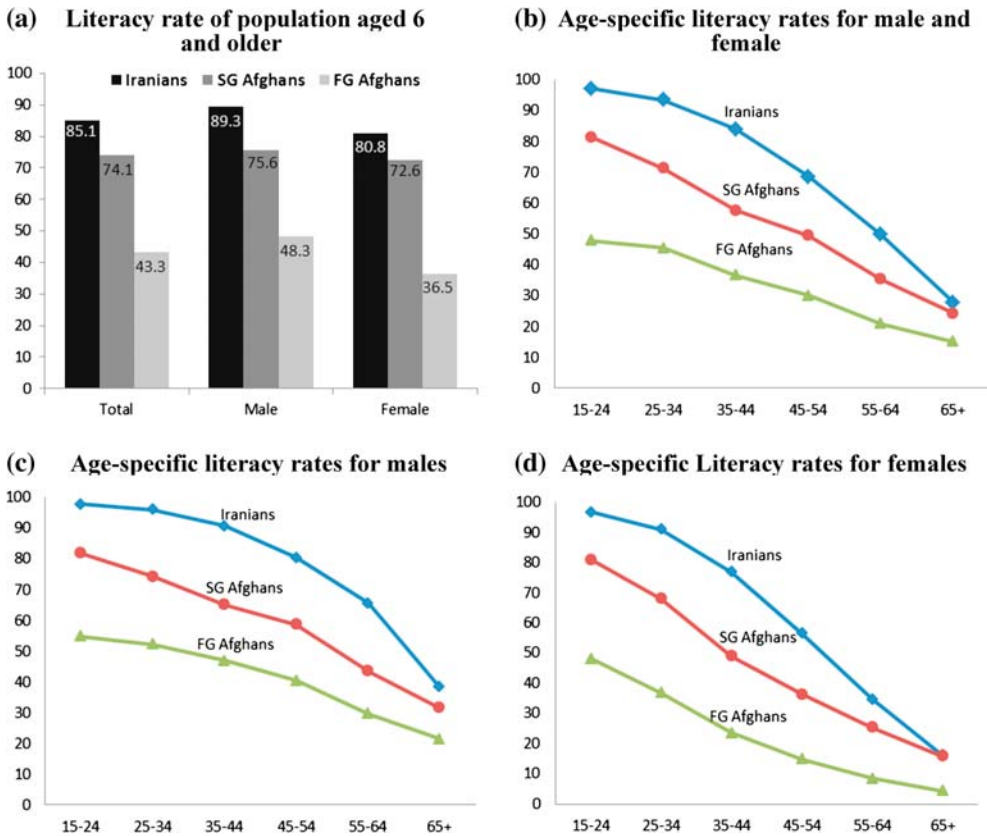


Figure 6. Iran: literacy status of first and second generation Afghan migrants compared with Iranians, 2006.

Source: Based on the Iranian 2006 census.

Afghan migrants having the lowest with the second generation occupying an intermediate position. It is important to note too that, for both Afghan groups, the literacy levels are above those prevailing in Afghanistan (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011). Panel (b) of the diagram shows that these trends hold when age-specific patterns are examined. It is also apparent that there is a significant decline in illiteracy with decreases in age and that the first generation–second generation gap is widest at the youngest ages. It is also evident in comparing panels (c) and (d) that male-female differences are greatest in the older ages and have been reduced among younger groups. There is definite evidence of literacy levels being improved among Afghan refugees (Figure 6).

These relative differences between the first and second generation Afghan settlers and native Iranians are maintained when the percentages attending school are examined. There is clearly a difference between the first and second generation Afghan refugees in Iran in their educational engagement (Figure 7). To investigate this issue further, micro-census data were used to match educational attainment of Afghan youth in Iran with that of their parents. The results are depicted in Figure 8 and show the extent to which Afghan youth in Iran have experienced upward mobility in their education compared with their parents. Clearly, both first and second generations have recorded significant upward mobility. It is interesting, however, that:

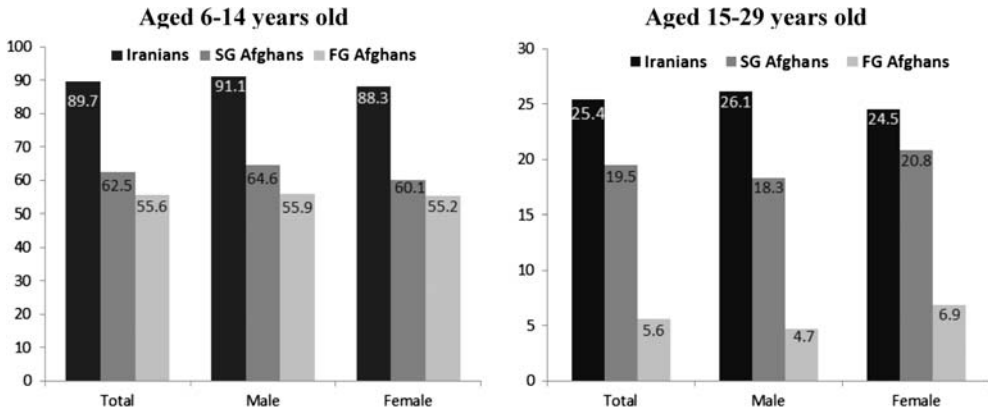


Figure 7. Iran: percentage currently attending school, 2006. Source: 2006 Iran census.

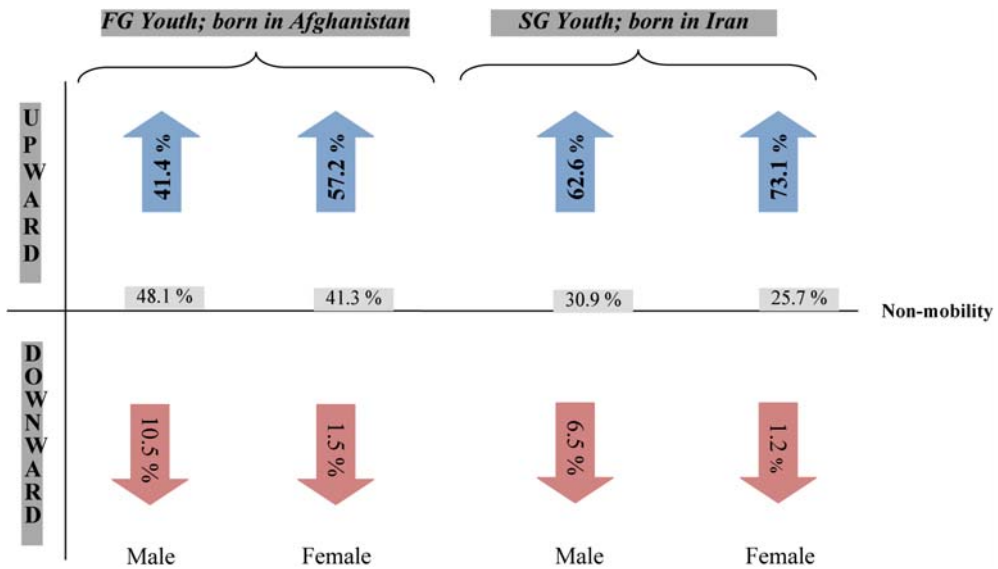


Figure 8. Iran: intergenerational mobility in educational attainment of Afghan youth (15–29) using father-son and mother-daughter matched data, by gender and generation, 2006. Source: Calculations based on micro-census data of Afghan immigrants in Iran, 2006.

- Upward mobility is significantly greater among the second-generation migrants.
- Upward mobility is greater for females than males.

To further investigate the education achievement of Afghan migrants and refugees in Iran, the educational achievement of first and second-generation migrants was compared with that of Iranian natives using the Index of Dissimilarity. This index can be interpreted as the percentage of one subpopulation that would need to change categories (in this case, educational attainment levels) in order to duplicate the distribution of another subpopulation. Hence, Table 3 shows the I_D for the educational distribution of first and second generation Afghans in Iran compared with that of native Iranians. The first generation clearly have a more different

Table 3. Iran: educational distribution of Afghan first and second generations immigrants compared with natives, 2006.

	Total						Male			Female		
	Native		FG Afghans		SG Afghans		Native	FG Afghans	SG Afghans	Native	FG Afghans	SG Afghans
Total population	19,0	64.6	30.2	14.0	61.4	28.9	24.0	69.1	31.7	24.0	69.1	31.7
No formal education	29.8	25.1	42.2	29.1	26.3	41.8	30.5	23.2	42.5	30.5	23.2	42.5
Primary	19.7	6.8	17.2	22.9	7.8	19.2	16.5	5.4	15.1	16.5	5.4	15.1
Lower secondary	23.6	2.8	9.2	25.1	3.4	8.8	22.2	2.0	9.5	22.2	2.0	9.5
Upper secondary	7.9	0.7	1.2	8.9	1.1	1.3	6.8	0.3	1.2	6.8	0.3	1.2
University education	1,138,715	52,260	33,227	567,722	30,759	17,070	570,993	21,501	16,157	570,993	21,501	16,157
N		0.46	0.24		0.47	0.28		0.45	0.20		0.45	0.20
Index of dissimilarity												
6–14 years old	4.3	39.1	30.9	4.1	38.4	29.2	4.5	39.8	32.7	4.5	39.8	32.7
No formal education	57.7	51.8	55.8	57.2	52.2	56.4	58.2	51.5	55.2	58.2	51.5	55.2
Primary	32.2	8.8	12.6	33.1	9.0	13.8	31.3	8.5	11.3	31.3	8.5	11.3
Lower secondary	5.8	0.3	0.7	5.6	0.4	0.6	6.0	0.2	0.8	6.0	0.2	0.8
Upper secondary												
University education	203,572	6,572	17,940	103,765	3,399	9,180	99,807	3,173	8,760	99,807	3,173	8,760
N		0.35	0.27		0.34	0.25		0.35	0.28		0.35	0.28
Index of dissimilarity												
15–29 years old	4.6	61.8	24.8	3.3	61.4	24.8	5.7	62.5	24.8	5.7	62.5	24.8
No formal education	17.9	24.9	26.8	14.7	24.8	25.0	21.0	25.1	28.7	21.0	25.1	28.7
Primary	21.8	9.0	25.1	26.1	9.3	28.1	17.8	8.2	21.8	17.8	8.2	21.8
Lower secondary	43.8	3.9	21.2	44.3	4.0	20.1	43.4	3.9	22.4	43.4	3.9	22.4
Upper secondary	11.9	0.4	2.1	11.6	0.5	2.0	12.1	0.3	2.3	12.1	0.3	2.3
University education	439,029	21,528	12,667	215,533	13,085	6,465	223,496	8,443	6,202	223,496	8,443	6,202
N		0.64	0.32		0.68	0.34		0.61	0.31		0.61	0.31
Index of dissimilarity												
30 and older	37.9	74.0	51.9	27.5	67.0	45.3	48.3	84.2	59.7	48.3	84.2	59.7
No formal education	28.9	17.9	23.7	29.8	21.7	24.5	28.0	12.4	22.8	28.0	12.4	22.8
Primary	12.8	4.4	10.3	16.1	6.0	12.6	9.6	2.0	7.7	9.6	2.0	7.7
Lower secondary	12.9	2.5	8.6	16.4	3.5	10.7	9.4	1.1	6.1	9.4	1.1	6.1
Upper secondary	7.5	1.2	5.5	10.2	1.8	6.9	4.7	0.3	3.7	4.7	0.3	3.7
University education	496,114	24,160	2,620	248,424	14,275	1,425	247,690	9,885	1,195	247,690	9,885	1,195
N		0.36	0.14		0.40	0.18		0.36	0.11		0.36	0.11
Index of dissimilarity												

Source: Calculations based on Iran 2006 census sample micro-data files for the foreign (10% of total) and Iranian population (2% of total).

educational attainment distribution than the native-born. This reflects the common pattern of the second generation occupying an intermediate position between the native and first-generation migrants, both among male and female migrants. The data presented here clearly show that Afghan refugees in Iran have experienced upward mobility in respect of education.

One of the most basic elements of our understanding of migration is that it is always selective and almost never a cross-section of the proportion at the origin and destination. Selectivity by such variables as age, gender and education are well established in the migration literature. There is less understanding, however, of dimensions of selectivity which are less amenable to measurement like risk taking, entrepreneurialism, willingness to question and break away from the status quo and propensity to make the most of available opportunities. Are the people with 'get up and go' more likely to 'get up and go'? A recent study in Australia, for example, argued that refugee-humanitarian settlers in that country had demonstrated higher levels of entrepreneurialism, economic risk taking, and initiative to such an extent that they were disproportionately represented in the nation's most wealthy people, although they arrived in the country with nothing (Hugo, forthcoming).² Does this selectivity offer an opportunity which could be built upon to build human capital to facilitate development in the home country of refugees?

Certainly, there is evidence from what has been presented here to support the contention that Afghan refugees in Iran have demonstrated initiative and some of the characteristics described above. There has been upward educational mobility despite the trauma and difficult circumstances of migration and the obstacles placed in their way by the Iranian government. Moreover, when faced with their exclusion from Iranian government schools, the Afghan refugee community took the initiative to establish their own 'shadow' educational system, which has been effective despite facing considerable difficulty. The question then becomes whether or not this capital can be harnessed to not only improve the lives of the refugees themselves but to facilitate development in their home country through return migration and diaspora engagement (Agunias & Newland, 2012).

Engagement in the workforce

The extent to which refugees engage in the economy of the destination country is relevant not only to their own well-being but also in terms of their contribution to development in the origin and destination countries. Their workforce engagement in the destination is a key factor in their development impact. Accordingly, in this section we examine the labour force engagement of Afghans in Iran.

There have been two bodies of theory which have guided research on the labour market performance of migrants in destinations. On the one hand human capital theory based on neo-classical economics argues (Wooden, 1994, 220):

differences in pay, occupational status, probability of employment, and so forth, between immigrants and natives reflect differences in the average productive co-abilities of the two groups.

A second approach argues that the labour market position of an individual is not just a formation of their characteristics and abilities but because they experience discrimination as a result of the group they belong to. Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Heller (2005), however, suggest that, in many contexts, both perspectives have relevance and that certainly is the case of Afghans in Iran. On the one hand, the previous section has demonstrated that Afghan workers have lower levels of human capital than Iranian natives and this influences the work they can do in Iran. On the other hand, there is evidence of discrimination against them in the Iranian labour market. For example, through a law instituted in 2000 (Article 48), the government sought to restrict access to Afghans to certain areas of employment.

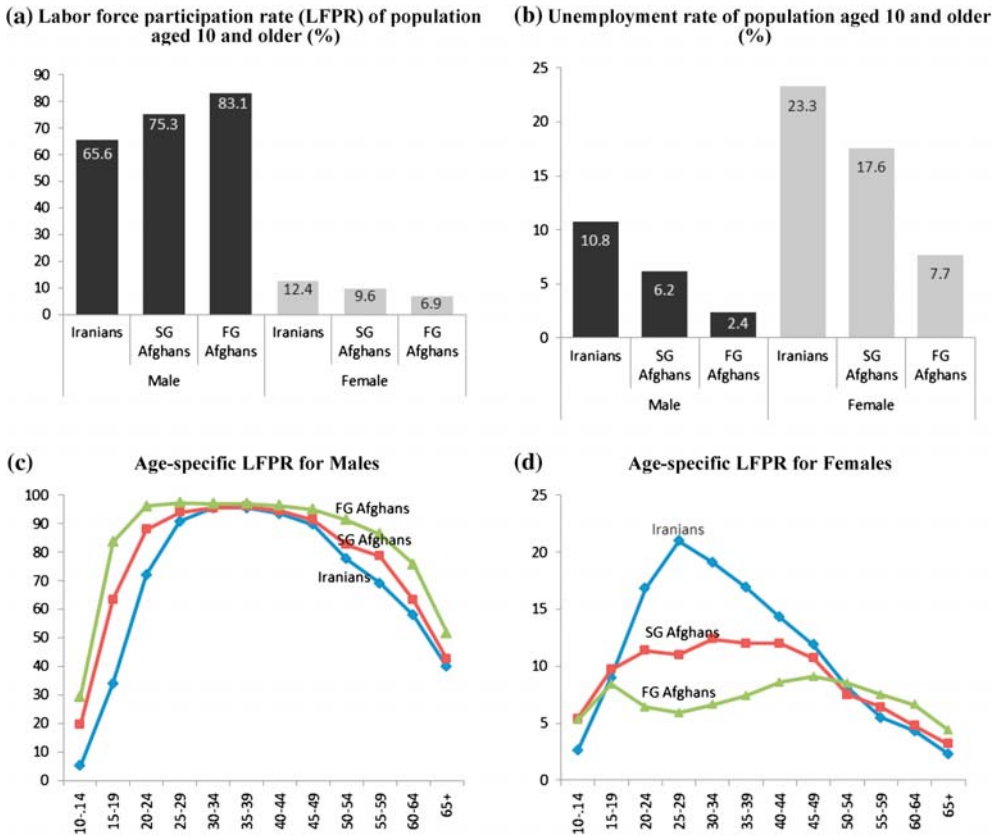


Figure 9. Iran: labour force participation of first and second generations of Afghans compared with Iranians, 2006.

Source: 2006 Iran census.

The 2006 population census indicated that Afghan refugees had a distinctive workforce profile when compared with the native population as is shown in Figure 9. It is interesting that there are higher levels of labour force participation among Afghans than for native Iranians. Moreover, levels of unemployment are higher among Iranians than among Afghans. To some extent, this reflects the situation that Iranians have higher levels of education and can afford more to not be working than Afghan refugees because they have more resources to fall back on. The patterns hold for males, while female participation rates are much lower among Afghans than Iranians, and unemployment levels are higher than for males. The differences in participation are most marked among younger and older workers for males and for the middle working ages for females. Hence, Afghan refugees in Iran have greater engagement with the workforce than native Iranians.

An International Labour Organization (ILO) study of Afghan workers in Iran in 2006 (Wickramasekara et al., 2006) made the following observations about them:

- Twenty-six per cent of Iranian employees work in the three sectors (manufacturing, construction, and trade and commerce) in which 80% of Afghans work. There is hence a degree of occupational segmentation.

- Afghan employees in Iran comprise regular workers (39%), casual workers (28%) and self-employed (23%).
- Many Afghan refugees are employed in the informal sector.
- Less than 3% of Afghan employees have written contracts while 77% were engaged on the basis of an 'oral contract'. The rest had no contract whatsoever. More than 99% of Afghan employees do not have any type of work-related insurance (accident, unemployment and retirement insurance).
- Iranian workers earn 12 to 20% more than their Afghan counterparts, even though the latter's work hours are around 10% longer.
- While 4% of Iranian workers are under 15 years of age, this is the case for 15% of the Afghans.

It is apparent that Afghans supply low-cost, low-skilled labour in a narrow range of sectors of the Iranian economy. The difference between Iranians and the first and second generation Afghans in their workforce engagement are clear in Table 4. As is the case with education, it is apparent that there is a massive difference between native Iranians and first generation Afghan migrants with the second generation occupying an intermediate position suggesting that there is some intergenerational mobility. The Index of Dissimilarity indicates that for first generation male migrants to duplicate the occupation distribution of the Iranians, over 40% would need to change categories. However, the percentage for the second generation is lower.

It is interesting, however, that there is not as much upward mobility in occupations among Afghan migrants as we saw earlier for education. Figure 10 shows that 21.5% of second generation sons experienced upward occupational mobility compared with 62.6% recording upward education mobility. This was more than for the first generation sons (16.3% compared with 41.4%). The difference compared with education reflects on the structural barriers to upward mobility of Afghan migrants within the labour market.

Clearly, the economic engagement of Afghans in Iran is considerable and reflects the maturity of their community. As in other migration destination countries there is much discussion in Iran about the impact of Afghan workers on the Iranian economy. There have been, for example, suggestions that the high level of unemployment among Iranians is due to the large number of Afghan workers. Yet, unemployment in Iran is concentrated among the highly educated and there are few Afghans competing for those jobs. Nevertheless, there have been effects on low-skill Iranian workers, especially in those parts of the country where the Afghan migrants are concentrated. However, it can be noted that in fact the areas of Afghan concentration are in provinces with the lowest levels of unemployment in Iran. They have in fact moved to areas where there are labour shortages. Afghan migrants are meeting the demand for low-cost, unskilled labour in sectors like construction and agriculture. Indeed, the viability of those sectors would be threatened if this supply of labour was not available.

In examining the development effects of migration, the sending of remittances to the homeland are of major importance. Unfortunately, the instability in Afghanistan and the informal modes (Maimbo, 2003) which dominate remittance sending there have meant that reliable indicative data are lacking. Even the World Bank, which has rendered an important service in bringing together global remittance data, indicates that 'Remittance data are currently not available for this country' (Ratha et al., 2011). Nevertheless, it is apparent that remittances play a crucial role in the wellbeing of many people in Afghanistan. One United Nations report estimated that Afghan remittances from Iran totalled US\$500 m which would equate to 5% of Afghanistan total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Overfield & Zumot, 2010; Torjesen, 2012; United Nations, 2008).³ Another study estimated that one fifth of farmers in Afghanistan rely

Table 4. Iran: occupational categories of Afghan immigrants and natives, 2006.

Job categories	Total			Male			Female		
	Native	FG Afghans	SG Afghans	Native	FG Afghans	SG Afghans	Native	FG Afghans	SG Afghans
	Legislators, managers, and administrators	2.3	0.3	0.6	2.3	0.3	0.6	2.6	0.1
Professional	8.1	0.5	1.7	5.5	0.5	1.2	24.4	0.5	6.3
Associate professional/ technical	4.0	0.3	1.0	3.9	0.3	0.9	5.3	0.4	2.1
Clerical and secretarial	5.1	0.2	1.1	4.9	0.2	0.9	5.9	0.3	2.2
Clerks, service and shop-sales workers	10.9	4.0	7.2	11.4	4.0	7.3	7.5	3.9	6.4
Skilled agriculture and fishery workers	23.7	12.8	12.6	24.7	12.7	13.1	17.2	16.2	10.6
Craft and related workers	18.4	25.3	28.5	17.2	24.6	27.1	26.5	39.6	39.8
Plant and machine operators and assembles	11.7	6.7	6.4	13.3	6.9	6.7	1.2	2.7	2.1
Unskilled labour	14.1	48.4	38.8	15.3	49.1	40.4	6.1	31.6	24.8
Unknown	1.7	1.5	2.1	1.5	1.4	1.8	3.3	4.7	5.2
N	345,507	26,053	6,421	298,625	24,904	5,791	46,882	1,149	630
Index of dissimilarity		0.41	0.35		0.41	0.35		0.42	0.34
Occupational status									
Employer	6.2	4.4	4.8	6.7	4.4	4.9	3.4	4.1	4.4
Self-employed	42.7	24.7	29.3	45.0	24.5	29.3	27.5	29.7	29.4
Employee in public sector	20.9	4.9	7.5	19.0	5.0	7.1	32.9	2.8	10.5
Employee in private sector	23.6	63.8	52.6	24.8	64.2	53.7	16.4	53.1	42.5
Unpaid family worker	4.7	0.6	3.0	2.8	0.4	2.3	16.7	6.4	9.4
Unknown	1.9	1.6	2.8	1.7	1.5	2.7	3.1	3.9	3.8
N	345,507	26,053	6,421	298,625	24,904	5,791	46,882	1,149	630
Index of dissimilarity		0.40	0.30		0.39	0.30		0.40	0.30

Source: Calculations based on Iran 2006 census sample micro-data files for the foreign (10% of total) and Iranian population (2% of total).

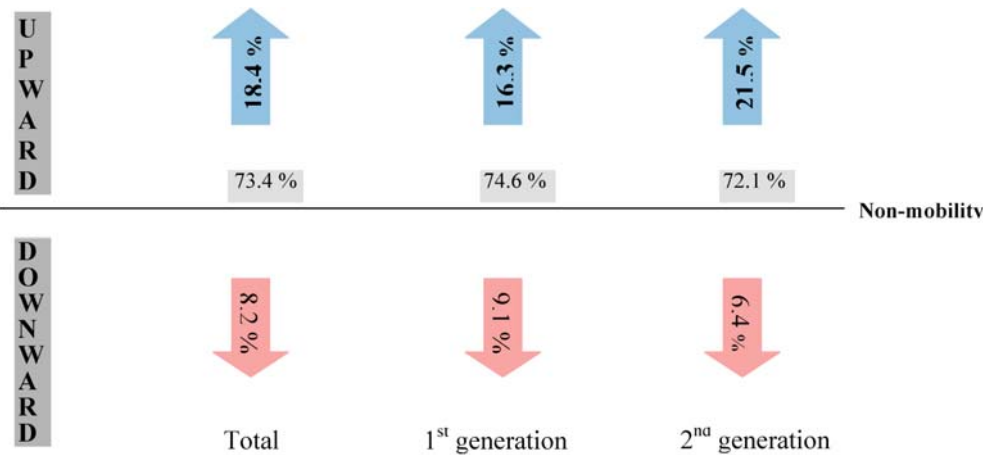


Figure 10. Iran: intergenerational mobility in occupational groups of Afghan male youth (15–29) using father-son matched data.

Source: Calculations based on micro-census data of Afghan immigrants in Iran, 2006.

on remittances (Maletta, 2006) and this figure is considered to be an underestimation (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2008, 20). Despite the undoubted significance of remittances already it has been suggested that the potential of this source to facilitate development in Afghanistan is much greater (IOM, 2008; Overfield & Zumot, 2010).

Remittances, however, are not the only way in which Afghan refugees can contribute to development in their homeland. In fact, there has been significant return flows. The UNHCR (2012b) has estimated that between 2002 and 2011, some 5.7 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan – 4.6 million with some UNHCR assistance. This has resulted in a 25% increase in the total population of the country. Of these returnees – some 886,000 – have come from Iran (UNHCR, 2012c). There is, therefore, considerable potential for returnees to use the human capital and other resources accumulated while they were in exile to assist in development of their homeland. Unfortunately, it is apparent that continuing insecurity in Afghanistan is stifling this potential impact. A UNHCR (2012b) assessment in both urban and rural Afghanistan found that more than 40% of returnees have not been able to re-integrate into their home communities.

Conclusion

The emphasis of policy on refugees in Iran since 2001 has been on encouraging and facilitating the repatriation of Afghan refugees. This has led to significant return migration although up to 2.5 million Afghans remain in Iran. Those that return will be taking with them higher levels of human capital endowment than is the situation of native Afghans who have remained in the homeland. Despite considerable barriers, there is evidence of educational and, to a lesser extent, occupational upward mobility among Afghan refugees in Iran. There is little argument that development and poverty reduction are fundamental to finding ultimate solutions to the violence, insecurity and conflict in nations like Afghanistan. Refugees can potentially play an important part in this process. It would seem that in many cases refugees are not only selective of particular groups whose lives are at risk as a result of the political situation in their homeland but they also often have significant human capital. It needs to be recognised that this human capital can provide the basis for improving their lives but also

contribute to the economic development of their homeland as well as their destination(s). Investments in assisting refugees to development and use their human capital need to be part of refugee policy and practice. Such policy always must have a basis in protection of the rights and safety of those displaced. However, it also needs to recognise that migration, albeit forced, can ultimately deliver positive outcomes to the refugees themselves, and to their origins as well as the communities they settle in permanently or temporarily. Such positive outcomes are not guaranteed, however, and developing policy and practice which facilitate them is an important priority.

Notes

1. Source: Iranian Ministry of Education.
2. One analysis (Stevenson, 2005) showed that five of eight Australian billionaires on the nation's 'richest list' indicate themselves or their parents had arrived in Australia as refugees.
3. Overfield and Zumot (2010, 9) indicate that Official Development Assistance accounts for almost a third of Afghanistan's GDP.

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