

The Rise of Human Mobility: An Analysis of Afghan Migration and Inward Remittances into Afghanistan's Economy

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Abstract

Afghanistan is the origin country of refugees and displaced peoples across the globe. Following the Syria and Iraq in the contemporary era, it has consistently influenced the global migration census since 1980. The outbreak of Afghan people started back in April 1978 after the assassination of Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan the first President of Afghanistan under the Savur revolution and control of political power by the Khalq democratic party in Afghanistan. The socio-political revolution interrupted the daily life of thousands of people belonging to the early government, and enforced them to leave the country toward destination countries to seek international protection. Thus, the massive exodus of Afghan people occurred in several phases toward destination countries during the last four decades. Dispersed emigrants resettled permanently in the destination countries based on relaxed immigration policies or stayed as refugees in transit countries. Similarly, majority of the people confronted economic challenges due to political upheavals shaped in Afghanistan, but the Afghan emigrants resettled in abroad frequently supported their families by sending personal remittances back in Afghanistan to assist them to meet their initial needs. In addition, the state collapse and takeover of the government of Afghanistan by the Taliban regime in 15 August 2021, repeated the vast outflow of Afghan people including high rank officials, elite and professionals, which were evacuated by the international allies of early government toward European countries, north America and Australia under the humanitarian assist program to prevent persecution and provide the safe shelter. Thus, the paper significantly highlights the phases of Afghan movement toward the high-income countries and discusses the Afghan diaspora and their impact on inward of remittances in to Afghanistan. Moreover, the paper deliberately focuses on flow of remittances and how that contributed in strength and growth of economy in Afghanistan. The data used from the latest financial reports of central bank of Afghanistan, World bank and IMF. Besides, IOM and UNHCR fact sheets and annual reports related to Afghan migration used to enrich the study.

Keywords: Inward of Remittances, Displaced People, Persecution, Taliban Regime, Economic Growth, Transitional Countries, Global North Countries

1. Introduction

Since ancient times, human being has migrated (Bertossi, Duyvendak and Foner) for a variety of causes, including economic incentives, natural disasters, climate change, and socio-political upheavals. Indeed, from the dawn of civilization to the present, humans have been crucial in determining how the world has developed [1,2]. Human beings' capacity to learn, adapt, and communicate has enabled to overcome complicated issues, invent, and create societies that have had a significant impact on culture, technology, and the environment [3-5]. However, automation and technology

have grown in significance, but are still human-made tools, not substitutes. Innovations in science, new technologies, and societal shifts are still driven by the people. Substantially, the world continues to advance largely due to the distinctiveness of human emotion, intuition, creativity, and moral reasoning. Industry productivity has always depended heavily on human efforts, despite advancements in automation and technology. Although automation and artificial intelligence (AI) are revolutionizing businesses by improving productivity and decreasing human error, it is evident that human interaction is still crucial for directing, boosting, and developing

industrial production [6]. Thereby, human characteristics as Innovation and problem-solving, skilled labor, leadership and decision-making, adaptability, collaboration and teamwork, emotional intelligence, ethics and sustainability are the key elements of human behavior, which could not be replaced by any technology or developed tools [7]. The acceleration of human mobility, both geographically and socially, has been largely attributed to the development of transport networks [8]. Besides, development of infrastructure such as Roads and Highways, Railroads, Ports and Airports, faster and more efficient transportation like automobiles, air travel, public transportation, Improved global trade and economic growth [8].

Although, transformation of technology and transportation brought comfort in human mobility, but lack of relaxed immigration policies in the global north countries, prevented the migration of individuals from global south and motivated them to choose irregular migration and face consequences as humiliation during the travelling between international borders [9-11]. In spite of technological development and AI in industrialized countries to decrease the human role in productivity, could not replace the human efforts to fulfilled the expectation. However, the ultimate decrease in the fertility rate of the global north countries, inspired to pull bulk of capital force from low-income countries to meet the need of labor shortages (Dolado, Goria and Ichino) [12]. Although, the latest studies show that, growth in the educational level of women in the global north countries, influenced the fertility rate and has grown a prominent decrease in population size of high-income countries (Vollset et al.,) [13,14]. Thereby, in today's scenario, emigration helped low- and middle-income countries to boost their economies (de Haas) based on export of human capital and promoting international migration toward high- income countries (Anderson, 2017), and supported to fulfill the shortage of labor in the host countries and generate the bulk of remittances and economic gains [5,15]. It is estimated that over (304) millions of individuals are in migration and residing out of their origin countries (UNDESA; ILO). Majority of the emigrants left their native countries due to lack of employment opportunities, low wages, worse living conditions and political upheavals. However, family reunification and educational reasons were also motivating for some of them to leave their mother land. Similarly, the movement of Afghan people mostly occurred due to internal war and political instability that started since 1978 and continued till the date.

Since last four decades, millions of people left their home towns to protect their lives from abuse, persecution and violation and choose to displace either internally or crossing the political borders, but it turned to a significant opportunity to emigrate into high income countries and seek economic advantages [16,17]. Similarly, millions of Afghan people choose to emigrate toward high income countries to avoid unemployment and seek better living condition. The emigration of Afghans happened irregular using Iran, turkey and Greece as transit countries to reach eastern Europe specifically Germany, while some of them travelled

based on regular visas [18]. Thus, the resettled Afghan migrants in the global North countries played a pivotal role in generating personal remittances to help their families back in Afghanistan. The paper significantly discusses the phases of outflow of Afghan people toward high income countries and portray the inward of remittances in to Afghanistan economy between years 2008-2023. The data related to the remittance's used from the reports of world bank, IMF and central bank of Afghanistan. Besides, United Nation Migration stock used to analyze the outflow of Afghan peoples around the globe.

1.1. Phases of Human Mobility from Afghanistan

Consequently, the socio-economic and political crunches in Afghanistan encouraged peoples to choose migration toward neighboring countries and abroad, but the outbreak of mass migration held after the major political upheavals occurred since 1978 [16,19-21]. Here are some prominent incidents that pushed millions of Afghan people to choose emigration toward neighboring countries and abroad.

• Saur Revolution and Soviet Invasion 1978-1979

The April 27, 1978 coup d'etat in Afghanistan that installed the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in power is known as the "Saur Revolution". First and Former President Mohammad Daoud Khan was overthrown as a result of the revolution, which was spearheaded by communist elements within the PDPA, particularly the Khalq faction and an era of communist leadership under Nur Mohammad Taraki began with the revolution and brought about a number of important political and social developments, such as the implementation of Marxist programs and land reforms. After growing unrest and opposition to the communist regime, the Saur Revolution ultimately resulted in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. The war was the catalyst for the Soviet-Afghan War, which raged until 1989 and left a lasting impact on the political and social climate of Afghanistan [22]. Particularly in Central Asia, the Soviet Union was extremely worried about the expansion of Western power and the possibility that the Islamic insurrection would extend to its own Muslim majority nations [23]. Afghanistan's proximity to Soviet Central Asia had long piqued the USSR's interest [24]. In order to protect its security and influence in the region, the Soviet Union was concerned that Afghanistan may either fall into the hands of Islamic fundamentalists or serve as a foundation for American dominance (Girardet). Thereby, the Afghan government, led by President Nur Mohammad Taraki (who was later succeeded by Hafizullah Amin), asked the Soviet Union for military assistance in order to quell the insurgency as the situation in Afghanistan worsened. The PDPA had believed that the Soviets would aid in stabilizing the nation. Thus, the invasion of Afghanistan was ordered by Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in December 1979. Initially, the Soviet Union sent some 80,000 troops with the goals of securing Soviet interests in the area, preventing Kabul from falling, and supporting the PDPA government [25]. The Soviet invasion, civil war and the revolution caused millions of Afghans to leave the nation, both internally, and with refugees migrating to other countries externally, the war generated widespread displacement of Afghan

nationals [9]. Where by the middle of the 1980s, there were significant numbers of Afghan refugees living in neighboring countries, especially Pakistan and Iran [26]. In spite of that, Secularism, women's rights, and land redistribution were among the drastic reforms formed by the communist regime which fiercely opposed by conservatives, tribal leaders, and religious organizations such as mujahideen, but the dispute swiftly turned into a full-fledged civil war and measures motivated the outbreak of people [27].

• Mujahideen Resistance and Withdrawal of Soviet Union 1979-1989

The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) administration, which was supported by the Soviet Union, and the Soviet occupation were resisted by the Mujahideen, a large and diverse organization of Afghan fighters. The term Mujahideen, which translates to "strugglers" or "fighters" in Arabic, describes people fighting the Soviet Union in a jihad (holy war). Although the resistance members came from a variety of political, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, they were all opposed to Soviet rule and Kabul's communist regime [27]. Thus, the Afghan local forces known as the Mujahideen, who fought the communist regime, fiercely resisted the Soviet invasion, and they were all committed to evicting the Soviets [28]. One of the most important and intricate insurgencies of the Cold War era was the Mujahideen's resistance to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1989), which had long-lasting effects on regional and international geopolitics and was crucial to the Soviet Union's eventual loss in Afghanistan [29].

• Occurrence of Civil War 1990-1994

Following the Soviet outlet in 1989, Afghanistan saw one of its most catastrophic times in the history, as a civil war formed that continued many years and was marked by bloodshed, instability, and suffering. The collapse of the Soviet-union in Afghanistan, infirmed the communist regime, and internal discord within the Mujahideen resistance groups [30]. After the Soviet Union left Afghanistan, a bloodshed civil war ruined out between groups of mujahedeen. After years of fighting, the Mujahideen militants such as Jamiat Islami, Hezb Islami, Junbish Milli and Hezb Wahdat who had been unified in their opposition to the Soviets, split into opposing factions and led to the rise of Taliban [31]. The critical socio-

economic and political situation pushed millions of the Afghan people specifically from the urban areas to leave their country toward neighboring countries and abroad.

• Republic and Mobility 2001-2021

After the fall of the Taliban first regime and establishment of new government in Afghanistan in 2001, arrival of refugees from neighboring countries accelerated and reached to four million returnees (Shalizi, Kumar and Azad). International communities assisted bulk of grants in aid to support the government in rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan. International NGOs and agencies provided technical assistance in different sectors to stabilize the public sector. In spite of that, thousands of Afghans intellectual and professionals left Afghanistan toward global north countries due to intensified political situation and security concerns. Thus, numerous programs implemented for emigration of Afghans to USA under Special immigration visa (SIV) that were involved in working with international communities [32]. Besides, estimated over hundred thousand of Afghan citizens engaged with international communities, evacuated by the special flights during the fall of government in August, 2021 toward high-income countries [33].

1.2. Afghan Migrants Across the Globe

Mass movement of Afghan people started after the withdrawal of Soviet Union and internal war in 1989. Though, millions of people mostly from the urban areas crossed the borders and left Afghanistan toward neighboring countries including Pakistan and Iran to secure their lives from humiliation. Besides, many religious minorities including Hindu, Sikh, and Christians left Afghanistan toward India and abroad [34]. Initially, the numbers of displaced people reached to estimated seven million which declined to three million due to willingly repatriation from neighboring countries between 2001-2003 [9]. Similarly, the number of Afghan emigrants accelerated between 2015-2023 due to security concerns and later by fall of government in 2021. However, the Afghan emigrants in the global north countries resettled permanently and founded the Afghan diaspora, but majority of the migrants still remain as refugees in neighboring countries [35].

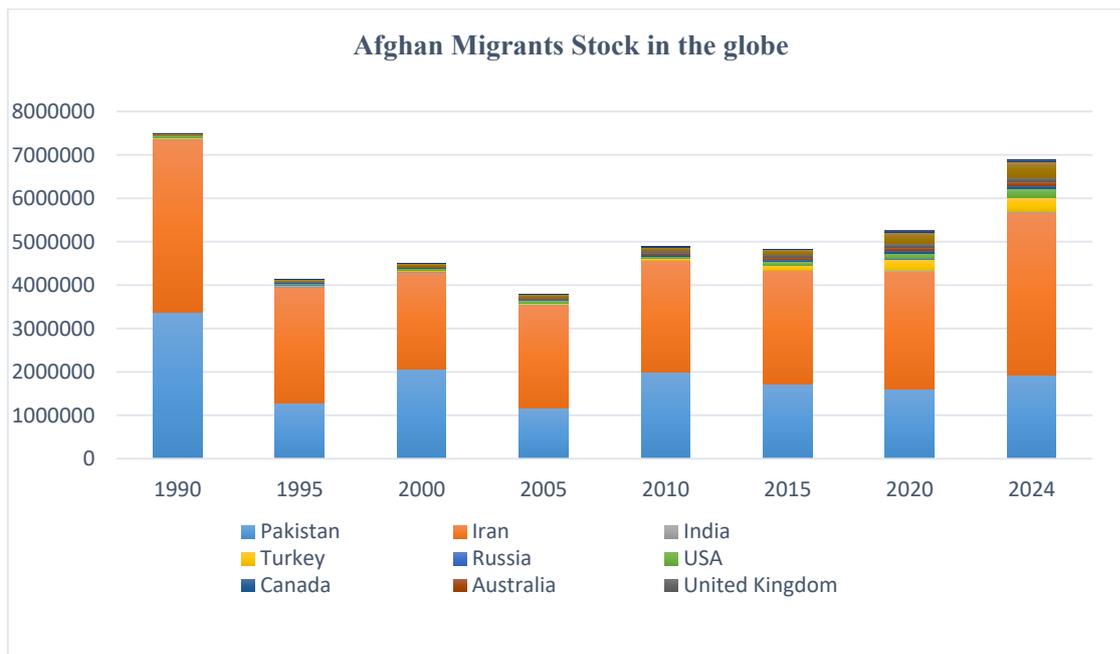


Figure 1: Afghan Migration Trends in the Globe (In Thousands)

According to the figure 1. the latest census of migration stock shows the numbers of Afghan emigrants with an estimated 7.5 million across the globe. However, Pakistan and Iran remain as the most common transit and destination countries for

the Afghan migrants, but restricted immigration policies in both countries motivated Afghan migrants to depart toward global north countries [9].

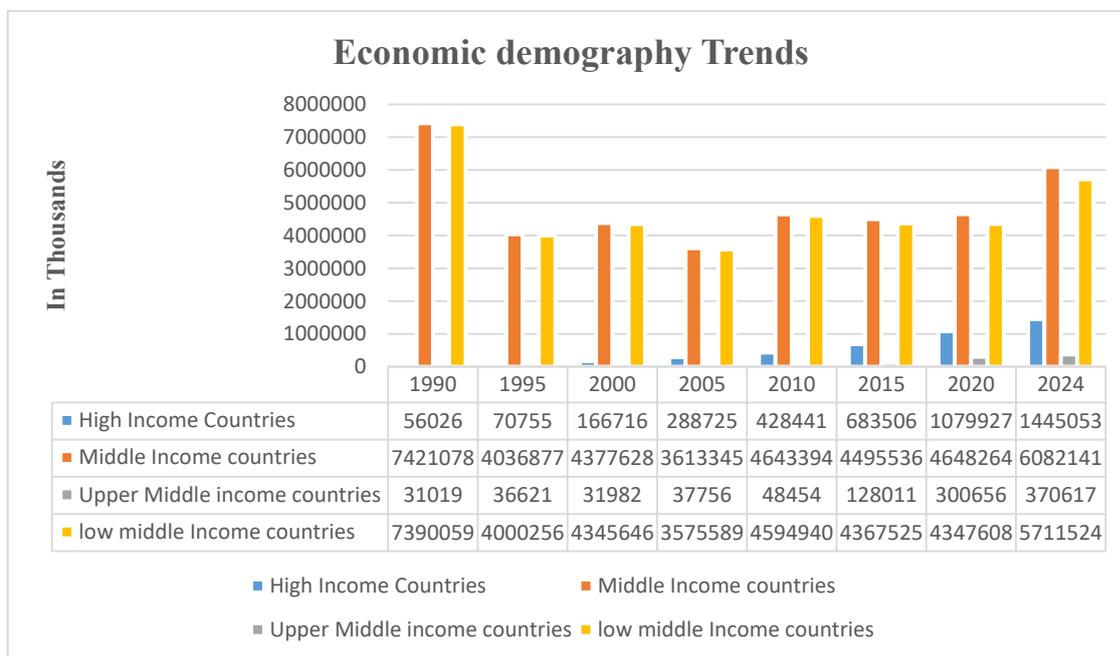


Figure 2: Share of Afghan Migrants Based on Economic Demography

According to the figure.2. the share of Afghan migrants in the high and upper middle-income countries is smaller than middle and low middle-income countries. It is to mention that majority of the Afghan migrants residing in Iran and Pakistan are not in the position to generate remittances for their families back in Afghanistan, but the Afghan diaspora resettled in the high and upper-middle-income countries plays a vital role in the inward remittances into Afghanistan.

1.3. Inward of Remittances and Economic Growth

The term “inward remittances” describes the money that people or organizations from other nations send or transfer into a nation. This usually occurs when individuals move abroad for employment or business and then send money home, frequently to support family members or make investments [36]. (Freund & Spata fora; de Haas), many developing nations rely on inward remittances as

a significant source of foreign exchange, which helps to support their economies [9,37]. They can be used to assist enterprises, finance healthcare and education, and raise living standards, among other things. A nation's exchange rates and balance of payments can be greatly impacted by remittance movements, which are monitored and controlled by governments and financial organizations [9,17].

Estimated over 7 millions of Afghans live abroad, and their remittances are vital to their families and financial system. Remittances from Afghans outside are more crucial than ever, as the country's economy and banking system collapses, the country experiences several political and economic tragedies at once, remittances are also in a terrible form. While, remittances are crucial to many Afghan families and the overall economy is influenced by it [38]. Afghans have been sending money to their family in Afghanistan for decades, either they are employed in Pakistan or in Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey, the Gulf countries, or beyond in Australia, Europe, or the United States.

Remittances sent overseas by Afghan communities collectively make up a sizable financial ecosystem. Formal remittances into Afghanistan in 2020 amounted to around USD 788 million, or approximately 4% of Afghanistan's GDP (World bank, 2025). Nearly one out of ten Afghan households rely on remittances as a source of income, according to the

2016–2017 Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS). Due to pandemic-related restrictions, informal, hawala-style money transfers were much less available as a channel to financial consumers, which forced previously informal transfers towards more formal, or digital, channels. This had an impact on the use of informal channels to send remittances in many Asian countries. Users had to discover alternative ways to send money into Afghanistan after Western Union and Money gram briefly stopped operating there and bank operations were put in jeopardy following the Taliban takeover (World Bank, 2024). However, the most significant transmission mechanism had never been those official channels. Only 15% of Afghans had bank accounts prior to the Taliban regaining control of the country, and even fewer frequently utilized them. Only 7% of women nationwide had access to formal finance, demonstrating how gendered this sector was already (World Bank, 2024). The hawala system and the unorganized sector continued to rule Afghanistan even though the formal banking system had been growing before the Taliban took power. The hawala system is an unofficial way to send money. Before the Taliban takeover, the hawala system occupied a grey zone in Afghanistan not entirely licit, nor illicit. Hawala has been linked to crime, money laundering and terrorism financing in Afghanistan and globally, but it is also crucial in remittances and money transfers where Afghans would not otherwise be able to access financial services.

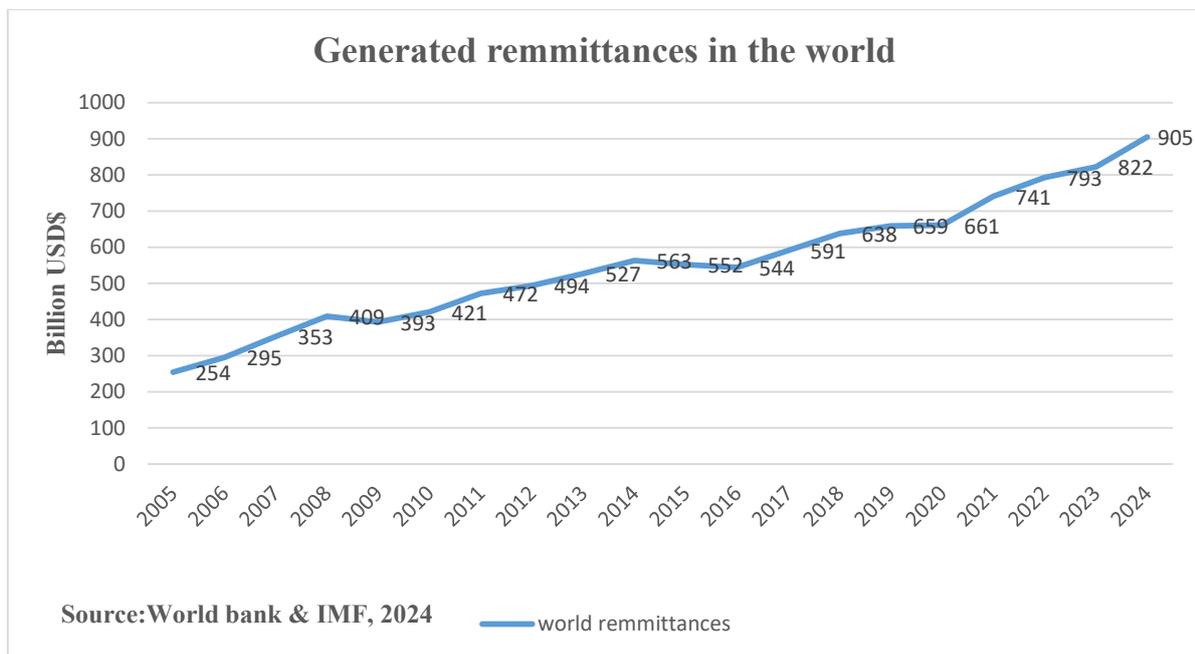


Figure 3: Inward of Remittances Between Years 2008-2023

According to the data set of the world bank and IMF, the number of personal remittances reached to 905 billion\$ USD and increased since 2005 due to mass migration trends in the globe. Although, the number of international migration stock reached to 304 million in 2024 (UNDESA) as it was recorded to 80 million in 2005 (UNDESA). Frequently, global north countries play a vital role in origination of remittances for the global south countries. Besides, the human mobility

toward high income countries is essential in fulfillment of labor deficiency in the high-income countries. Thereby, international migration is significant for the socio-economic upliftment of low- and middle-income countries. India located at the top in recipient of personal remittances with an estimated 129 billion USD and sender of international migrants in the globe followed by China, Mexico, Philippine and Egypt [9].

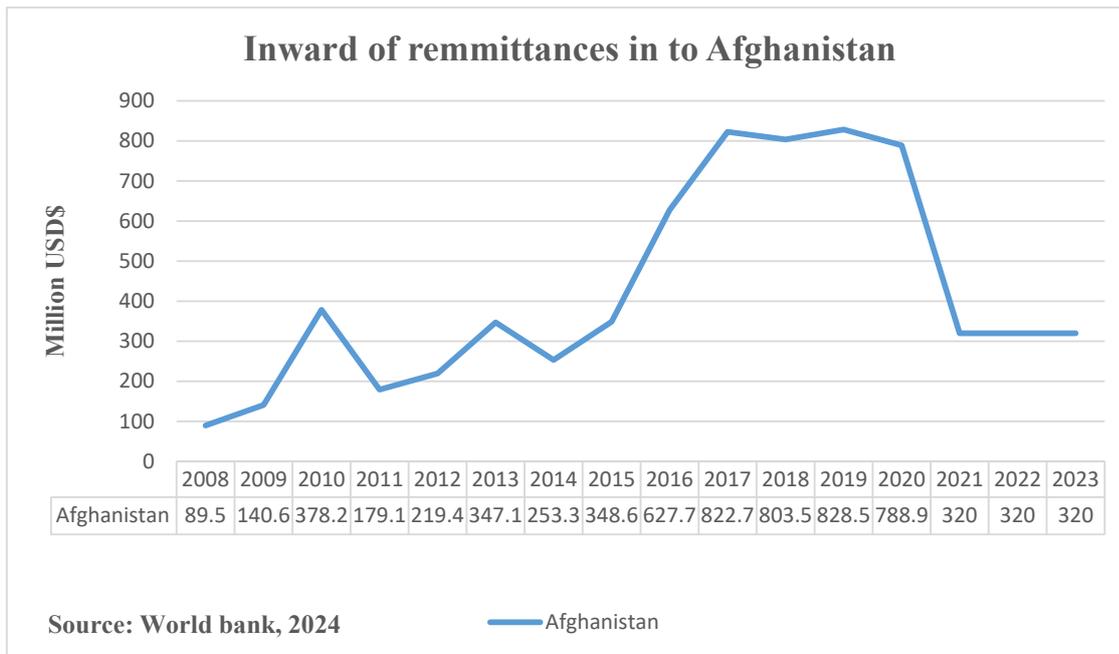


Figure 4: Inward of Personal Remittances in to Afghanistan

Afghanistan receives millions of personal remittances since 2008 and its share increased due to outflow of migrants around the globe, specifically toward high and upper middle-income countries as north America, European countries Australia and Gulf countries. The number of Afghan migrants residing abroad reached to estimated seven million (UNDESA). According to the data set of world bank, the inward of personal remittances reached to 822 million USD between year 201-2019, but the Political upheavals in 2021, disrupted the inward of remittances due to sanctions and inappropriate banking system in Afghanistan (ADB, 2023; World Bank,2024). Thus, hawala became an alternative for sending money and commonly practices by the emigrants,

it is an informal approach of money transaction which is frequently used by the Afghan nationals [39].

1.4. Share of GDP Based on Personal Remittance’s

However, Afghanistan GDP is influenced by international donations, import-export and Agriculture, but inward of remittances played a key role in attaining daily needs of million people. In the last two decades international communities assisted Afghanistan government to uplift its economy by injecting over 20 billion USD (Lee, 2022). Similarly, the inward remittances in to Afghanistan support millions of people’s daily need.

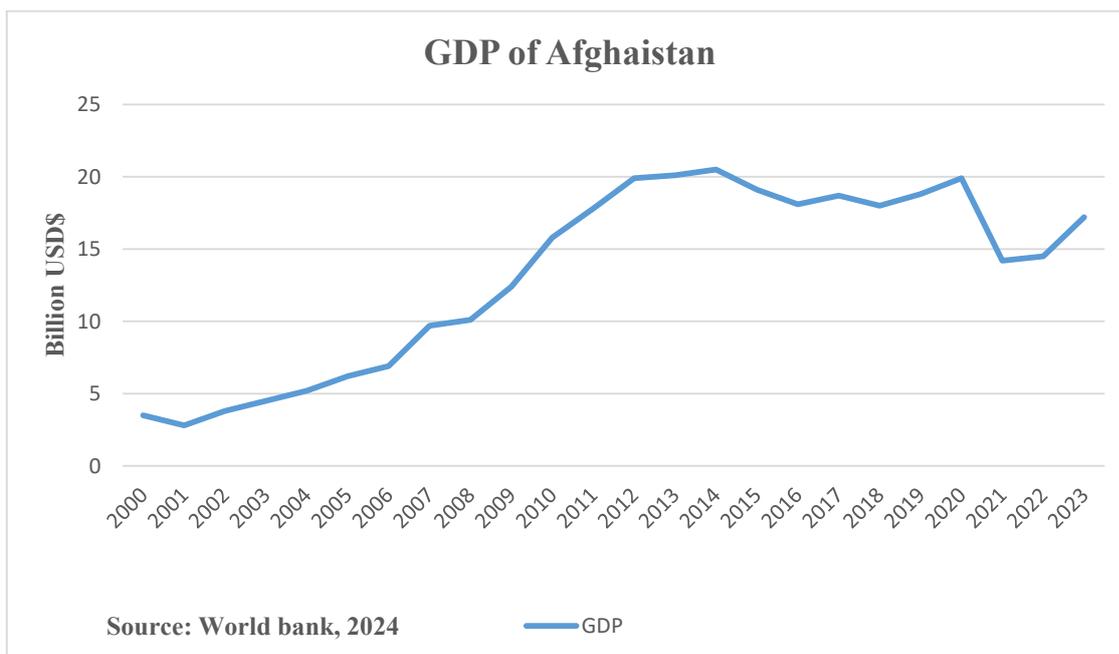


Figure 5: Growth of GDP in Afghanistan

GDP of a country rely on import, export, consumption, foreign direct investment (FDI) and government expenditure. Besides, the inward remittances play an essential role in enhancing the economy of a country (World bank, 2024). Thus, the Figure.5. portray the growth of GDP in Afghanistan since 2000. The world bank data shows that an enormous growth of economy shown between years 2001-2020 which

reached to 20 billion USD. According to the data, the growth of GDP of Afghanistan reached to 21% in 2012, and later declined to 2.7 % in 2023. The main reason of decline in growth of GDP in Afghanistan, was political instability, drop of international aids, reduction in import and export and impose of sanctions on banking system [40].

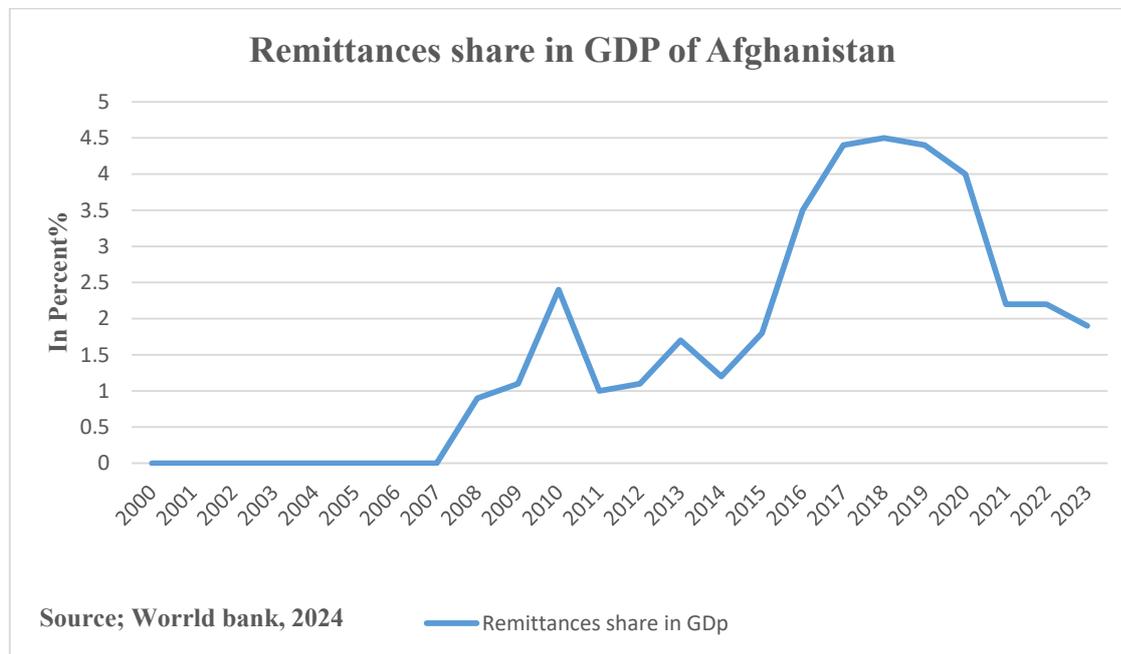


Figure 6: Share of Remittances in GDP of Afghanistan

According to the figure.6. the share of inward remittances into GDP of Afghanistan touched 1% since 2008. However, the numbers increased annually and laid effect with estimated 4.5% on the entire GDP in 2019. Afghan emigrants residing in high- and middle-income countries sent money to their families back in Afghanistan, which contributed near to 2% share in GDP of Afghanistan economy.

2. Conclusion

Afghanistan and the surrounding area suffered long-term consequences from the emigration of Afghans during the last four decades including Saur Revolution, the Soviet-Afghan War and political unrest between years 2001-2021. Numerous Afghans sought asylum in the West, Pakistan, and Iran, where sizable diaspora groups raised. After the Soviet exit in 1989, some of these refugees were eventually able to return home, but the continuous civil war and security concerns in Afghanistan kept the country in chaos and economic crises. Besides, Emigration caused "brain drain," of thousands of professionals and intellectuals as many highly qualified and educated experts left the nation. Hence, making it more difficult for the nation to recover from the war, but emigration of Afghan people played a significant part in inward of remittances and economic growth of Afghanistan.

Recommendations

- In order to stop human rights violations, Afghans should prevent irregular migration.
- Afghanistan's government should produce skilled-Semi

skilled labor groups for export and sign memorandums with high-income countries to encourage international migration.

- The Afghan government should improve and encourage the banking sector, which simplifies inward remittances for the recipients.
- Government of Afghanistan need to develop migration data base to produce accurate data set of Afghan Migration.

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