

Tehran hosts 2m foreigners

Complex case of Afghan refugees in Iran



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Social Desk

For over four decades, Iran has been a generous host to millions of Afghan refugees, providing those coming from a war-torn neighboring country with shelter, education, and health care. However, in the wake of the Taliban's takeover, the state of Afghan refugees in Iran has become the subject of much scrutiny and heated discussions. To many Iranians' dismay, the arrival of the new waves of Afghan refugees in Iran, with their number estimated to be around 1.5 million, has led to a surge in anti-refugee sentiment. Prior to the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, it was estimated that between 2 to 3 million Afghan refugees resided in Iran, making the country host to one of the largest refugee populations in the world. But recently, many Iranians have come to believe

that the unceasing waves of Afghan refugees seeking asylum in Iran have gotten out of hand, further straining an already weakened economy. This sentiment was echoed by some Iranian authorities as well. Mayor of Tehran Alireza Zakani has recently stated that "about two million foreigners live in Tehran" now, most of whom are Afghan nationals. "More than 700,000 [these foreigners] have been identified in the last year, which shows this phenomenon to be a growing trend." He further stated that "the impact of foreigners' arrival" should be examined, signaling a growing concern among authorities. Of course, such a concentrated population of refugees in any given city is no light matter. In Iran, especially in the capital of Tehran, some view the Afghan refugees as a burden on the already strained resources and job market.

One of the main arguments put forth by those critical of the mass presence of Afghan refugees is the perceived pressure it puts on Iran's subsidized services. Critics claim that Afghan nationals benefit from subsidies provided for essential commodities such as bread, electricity, water, and gas, which should ideally be reserved for Iranian citizens. This argument has gained traction, as the majority of Afghan refugees rely on these subsidies for their daily needs.

Another argument that arises in the debate surrounding Afghan refugees in Iran is the inflation of rent prices in major cities and their suburbs due to the significant presence of Afghan nationals. Critics argue that the large influx of Afghan refugees has created a surge in demand for housing, leading to a scarcity of affordable accommodation for both Iranians

and Afghan refugees alike. This has resulted in an unbridled increase in rental prices, making it challenging for many individuals and families to secure adequate housing and exacerbating an already pinched housing market. Zakani also highlighted the importance of the settlement of the refugees, introducing it as a challenge related to the activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Program. According to the mayor, "Many of them live in illegal settlements that cannot be organized since these refugees lack identity documents."

However, the issue of Afghan refugees in Iran should be approached with a multi-dimensional perspective. Afghan refugees in Iran often face significant challenges and vulnerabilities. Many have fled conflict, persecution, and economic hardships in their home country,

seeking safety and better opportunities in Iran. They often work in low-wage jobs, facing precarious living conditions and limited access to education and health care.

"Afghan immigrants have always done the hardest work with the lowest wages and without any privileges," said Ayatollah Behsoodi, an Afghan cleric living in Iran, regarding the matter. The working refugees in Iran are not insured and, therefore, are prone to exploitation by their employers. "[They] are neither insured nor supported by institutions and organizations; if an accident happens to them, there is no one to support them and compensate them."

Apart from that, it is crucial to acknowledge the historical context and the long-standing relationship between the two countries of Iran and Afghanistan. Through shouldering menial jobs, the Afghan refu-

gee population has made significant contributions to Iranian society and economy, especially in sectors such as construction and agriculture.

While concerns regarding subsidies and resources are valid, it is essential to focus on the issue with empathy and a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play. Getting to grips with the challenges faced by Iran — as a country that hosts millions of Afghans — requires a balanced approach that considers both the humanitarian aspect regarding the refugees and the economic and social impacts that their stay has on the host community.

It is crucial at this point to note that during the recent refugee ordeal, Iran has been mainly on its own, not receiving any major help from the international community. It is imperative that Iran and the international community

work together to find sustainable solutions regarding the matter. It would ideally include supporting host communities, providing adequate resources, and promoting initiatives that enhance the self-reliance and integration of Afghan refugees.

Surely, the surge in anti-refugee sentiment directed towards Afghan nationals residing in Iran calls for a nuanced understanding of the issue. "We should avoid any emotional approach when facing the issue of immigrants," said Iranian lawmaker Ahad Alirezabeigi. "Considering the multiple dimensions of the immigration, it is necessary to pursue a comprehensive bill in this field."

Hopefully, voices like that of Alirezabeigi would come to the fore, helping inform the public about the positive aspects of hosting a large refugee population.

Iran's aging population major threat to its future

By Mahdieh Qazvinian
Staff writer

Iran is experiencing an acceleration in population aging. The proportion of people older than 60 years in Iran has exceeded 10% of the total population in

2022. While, the population growth rate in Iran is 0.7%, which is the lowest rate in the past 25 years.

Alireza Khosravi, a researcher at the Research Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, expressed his concern about the rapid increase in Iran's aging population in an exclusive interview with Iran Daily. He pointed out that the increase in the country's elderly population requires some exact media planning to meet their communication needs.

Speaking at the sidelines of a symposium on the role of mass media in the elderly lifestyle held on

the occasion of the International Day for Older Persons, Khosravi emphasized the important role that the media plays in communication and media planning on behalf of Iran's older persons. However, there is a gap in the national media as it does not frequently produce special programs for the elderly, said Khosravi, who is also a university professor working in the field of communication.

One of the most important issues that arise when you get old is the relationship that develops between the elderly and their family members. So far, the country's mass media has largely ignored the elderly and

their interests. After the production of the Iranian TV series "Pedar Salar," which was aired on national TV in the 1990s, no other series was produced that specifically cared for the elderly, Khosravi noted.

"Some steps should be taken to create appropriate programs for the elderly in the country. In producing such programs, we should be aware of what we are communicating and to which audience. It should be noted that the elderly differ in terms of their taste, attitude, needs, interests, and attention spans. The aging issue has not been discussed much in Iran. However, the public will hopefully be

made more aware of the issue since the birth rate has decreased all over the world and especially in Iran while the number of the elderly has increased in the communities."

Khosravi stressed that in producing such targeted programs, we should bear in mind that the security and peace of the elderly should not be disturbed because the elderly do not want to be separated from what they are used to. Moreover, they are looking for programs that bring them the peace that they so desire.

He added that to produce suitable programs, all economic, social, and cultural

factors must be considered. The environment in which the country's old people are living must also be given adequate attention.

To make matters more complicated, rural and urban elderly are totally different all over the world, and Iran is no exception to this. As such, the programs that are made should meet their needs and interests. For instance, the elderly who are living in rural areas of Iran typically engage in farming or animal husbandry until they have the energy to do so. It is to be expected that these older persons who are working hard in rural areas have less time to survey the media.

