

Exploring the roots of immigrant phobia in Iran, conversation with a social science researcher:

"Immigrants are seen as the other, blamed for problems".

Iran has hosted millions of Afghan refugees for years, but a new wave of Afghan migration to Iran began after the Taliban came to power. The arrival of new migrants brought many problems to the country.

The massive and irregular migration of Afghan citizens to Iran took on greater dimensions during the two periods of the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and especially during the Taliban's re-conquest of the country in 2021.

Various statistics on the number of Afghan migrants in Iran range from 3 to 10 million. The presence of such a large population in Iran, especially given the illegal presence of many of them and their lack of registration or identification, has provoked different reactions in society; some believe that the illegal immigrant population should be expelled from the country by any means possible, while others, given the current situation in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, want to welcome the Afghan population to ensure security and improve their quality of life in their homeland.

On the other hand, the Islamic Republic of Iran is facing severe economic problems due to years of sanctions from Western countries, and new guests have added to the volume of these problems. Unfortunately, there is no legal solution for these immigrants in Iran due to the lack of immigration laws. Even people who immigrated to Iran decades ago do not know what to do to live legally in Iran. On the other hand, some certain and suspicious movements have started a wave of anti-Afghanism and instead of demanding proper immigration laws, they are trying to expel even Afghans who were born in Iran and respect the laws of this country.

The main purpose of these actions is to create tension between the two governments and the two nations of Iran and Afghanistan. Therefore, everyone should be vigilant and only look for reliable news and sources.

Ghamar Takavaran, an Iranian researcher and writer in the field of Afghan migrants in Iran, in an exclusive interview with Shafqana Afghanistan, analysed the causes and roots of anti-immigrant and anti-Afghan movements in the virtual space and considered the reason for this issue as Iran's internal problems and economic conditions, stating: "Migrants in Iran are seen as the other, with problems imposed on them."

Referring to the changes taking place in European countries regarding migrants and refugees, Takavaran says that anti-immigrant movements are common to all countries, adding: "In every society there are always individuals who are against the presence of migrants, and usually right-wing political movements also promote and support this kind of view".

Takavaran goes on to say that "anti-immigrant movements in Iran also occasionally emerge with media hype" and saw the reason for these movements as Iran's internal problems and economic conditions, which portray migrants as the main culprits: "The role of Iran's internal and economic problems should not be overlooked. In fact, migrants in Iran consider as other

whom problems are imposed. Whenever a problem arises, some people look for a culprit, and who better to blame than Afghan migrants? Although the root of many of these problems lies elsewhere. It should also be stressed that what we see in such waves is an anti-migrant sentiment rather than a fear of migrants!

The researcher of Afghan migrants in Iran, speaks about the tactics and methods of anti-immigrant movements that use the widespread distribution of old and repetitive films and news to generalise about the entire migrant community. She continues: "It may be due to a real event, such as a migrant committing a crime, or it may be that no new incident has occurred and an old clip has been circulated on social networks, causing the spread of such opinions. It should be noted that even if a crime is committed that seems to have triggered the latest wave, the entire migrant population should not be blamed. The crime of one person should not be attributed to the entire migrant community. If a Yazdi person commits a crime, do we conclude that all Yazdi people are criminals? Such a view is not correct, and we know that statistically the percentage of crimes committed by Afghan migrants is lower than that of Iranians in relation to their population".



Ghamar Takavaran, Iranian researcher

Takavaran considers the anti-immigrant waves to be detrimental to Iran-Afghanistan relations and influential in shaping negative prejudices of the people of both countries towards each other and says: "These media waves have a very negative impact on public opinion on both sides; that is, an Iranian develops a negative view of an Afghan and an Afghan develops a negative view of an Iranian. If these negative feelings are widespread, everyone will suffer.

The social researcher criticised the short-term view of the migrant issue in Iran, arguing that this issue needs research planning in order to arrive at appropriate policies, adding: "The problem is that we have never gone to the root of the problem. Whenever the media hype intensifies, some interviews are conducted, some officials express their opinions, but as soon as the media hype subsides, the issue of migrants is removed from the priorities, and no one follows up on it. In fact, when there is no hype, we should focus on the issue, away from the media and emotional reactions, and look for plans and strategies to solve it. Millions of Afghan migrants have been living here for decades, but we have never had a clear policy and planning for migrants.

Takavaran considers the government responsible for the anti-immigrant movements and waves and believes that the government should take a serious approach to this issue. She criticises the previous governments' policies on migrants and considered the management of migrants as the most important task of Mr Pazshkian's government: "So far, governments have not had an operational policy on migrants, and the plans that have been proposed in recent years are problematic. Iran has always said in recent years that it wants to manage migrants. Mr Pazshkian's government seems to have the same goal of managing migrants. We have never understood what exactly is meant by management. We're not the only ones who don't know, but I think even at the higher levels there is no clear understanding of what management means and what policies will be followed for migrants.

Link to the interview:

<https://af.shafaqna.com/FA/613416>