

Afghan refugees in Central Asia and Russian federation

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According to the UN in 2012 the world had over 10 million refugees,¹ of which about 2.7 million people – refugees from Afghanistan.² Afghanistan – the Central Asian state rich culture and tragic historical destiny. Complex socio-political and military situation in Afghanistan, the international controversy of the XX-XXI centuries led to the emergence and increasing of the problem of Afghan refugees. The current situation in Afghanistan, the UN estimated as "worsening security situation in some regions of Afghanistan and the continuing human rights violations during the armed conflict."³

The list of risk groups, which is not comprehensive, include: peoples associated with the Afghan government and the international community; aid workers and human rights activists; journalists and other media professionals; civilians suspected of supporting armed anti-government forces; members of religious Minorities and persons deemed violators of Sharia law; certain groups of women and children; victims of trafficking; ethnic and sexual minorities. The year 2011 with a request for asylum in various countries have addressed 35 700 (thirty-five thousand seven hundred) Afghans. This is 34% more than the year before.⁴

The Central Asian States and Russian Federation regards international humanitarian cooperation, the activities of United Nations High

¹ World Refugee Day // <http://unhcr.ru/index.php?id=61>

² Verhoturov, D. The politicization of the issue of Afghan refugees in the region // <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/23511.html>

³ UNHCR guidelines for assessing the international protection needs of asylum-seekers from Afghanistan // http://www.unhcr.org.ua/img/uploads/docs/Afghanistan%20EG_17%20Dec%202010_RUS.pdf

⁴ Experts point increase in the number of Afghan refugees // <http://www.pressa.tj/news/eksperty-omechayut-rost-chisla-afganskih-bezhencev>

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, UN Refugee Agency) as an important and necessary part of comprehensive efforts to maintain international peace, security and stability. The basic principles of the state migration policy the Central Asian States and Russian Federation recognize the improvement of the asylum system, to assist the voluntary return of refugees, creating favorable conditions for social and cultural integration of forced migrants and the development of programs of social support.

However, experts note that in recent years the countries of Europe and America began to reduce government programs to receive Afghan refugees. Most of the countries interested in the Afghans remained in Central Asia. Some of them are even willing to finance projects in this direction. For example, it was learned that Denmark is ready to finance the deployment in Tajikistan six thousand Afghan refugees.⁵ Note that according to "Voice of Russia" Tajikistan is the only country in Central Asia, not to reject Afghan refugees.

The main principle of regional security in Central Asia after the collapse of the USSR was isolated from the Afghan conflict zone. However, this policy has not paid off. The Central Asian states failed distance itself from the situation in Afghanistan. Researchers currently identified three main components of the negative impact of the Afghan situation:⁶ 1) the production and distribution of drugs, 2) the interaction of the opposition of radical Islamic groups in Central Asia with the political and military forces in Afghanistan, and 3) Afghan refugees.

According to the head of the Association of Afghan refugees "Ariana" Asadullo Vadzhah, the official number of registered refugees in Tajikistan is about 5000 people.⁷ Other sources put the number at 4,000 persons.⁸ Tajikistan is located at 90% of Afghan refugees living in Central Asia. Kazakhstan officially registered 600 Afghan refugees. Afghan

⁵ *Fashutdinov, G.* Afghan refugees in Tajikistan dream about the West // http://rus.ruvr.ru/2012_10_02/Afganskije-bezhenci-v-Tadzhhikistane-mechtajut-o-Zapade/

⁶ *Knjazev, A.* The influence of the Afghan crisis on security in Central Asia // <http://www.dslib.net/istoria-otechestva/vlijanie-afganskogo-krizisa-na-bezopasnost-centralnoj-azii.html>

⁷ Experts point increase in the number of Afghan refugees // <http://www.pressa.tj/news/eksperty-otmechajut-rost-chisla-afganskij-bezhencev>

⁸ *Fashutdinov, G.* Afghan refugees in Tajikistan dream about the West // http://rus.ruvr.ru/2012_10_02/Afganskije-bezhenci-v-Tadzhhikistane-mechtajut-o-Zapade/

refugees in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, are not officially registered.⁹

Almost all Afghan refugees consider Tajikistan as a transit point on the road to welfare countries. Experts call the two reasons for this attitude. One – economic, second - psychological. The vast majority of refugees from Afghanistan are ethnic Tajik and Sunni Muslims. Many of them have higher education. Local people treat them controversially.

There was special UN program until 2007 to resettle refugees from Tajikistan to third countries, but it was subsequently terminated. The same year the Tajik authorities have tried to evict refugees from Dushanbe (where they came in search of work) in the remote border areas where they were once registered. Refugees were allowed to live only in certain cities and regions. Uzbekistan in the 1990s forced the Afghan refugees to leave the country. As a result, today in Uzbekistan live practically only Afghan businessmen, who have special accreditation.¹⁰

The Afghan refugees in Kazakhstan must every year to prove the special commission that the war in their country is not over yet. By law refugee status in Kazakhstan is limited to one year, and taking the new law "On Refugees" (2010), the parliamentarians did not change the time limit.¹¹

For Russia, Afghanistan is undoubtedly geopolitical interest. Due to the fact that the country borders Iran, Pakistan, India, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, Afghanistan is one of the key points of Russia's interests in Central Asia. Embassy of the Russian Federation also represents the interests of the Republic of Belarus in Afghanistan.¹²

Mass escape from Afghanistan began in the 1980s after the Soviet invasion and the deployment of full-scale civil war. Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan in February 1989. The Najibullah

⁹ Most of the refugees living in Tajikistan are from Afghanistan // <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/52153.html>

¹⁰ Verhoturov, D. The politicization of the issue of Afghan refugees in the region // <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/23511.html>

¹¹ Kazakhstan prepares for a new influx of refugees from Kyrgyzstan // <http://news.nur.kz/149366.html>

¹² Stureiko, S., Medianik, V. Afghanistan: The Ethno-Political Conflict and the Problem of Displaced Persons. – Minsk, 2009. – 272 p.

government fell in April 1992. Afghans start of immigration to Russia is just the beginning of the 1990s. The first wave of Afghan emigration to Russia were mainly former activists of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, an Afghan army, police and security services. Although in the early 1990s, compared to today, it was much easier to get to the West, the former Afghan allies of Moscow, preference is given Russia. By the mid-1990s in Russia were the most educated part of the Afghan elite. According to experts, Russia, which became the legal successor of the USSR, has a moral obligation to accept them, granting legal status and arrangement of these Afghans.

After the Taliban coming to power in the mid-1990s, a second wave of Afghan migration to Russia. Afghan remnants of the educated class, which included many supporters of mujahideen fled to Russia and other countries.

There are several forms of asylum in Russia. Temporary asylum or humanitarian status is granted to foreign nationals who could not return home because their lives are inhumane treatment by the authorities or by the population. The federal law on refugees provides for them a sufficiently broad law that in many ways similar to the rights of Russian citizens. For example, they have the right to medical care, have the right to work without a special permit and a number of legal safeguards. Political asylum is granted by decree of Russian President.

An official record of Afghans arriving in Russia records were not kept, so it is quite difficult to ascertain the extent of their presence in Russia. Estimated leaders of the Afghan community is 100-150 thousand.¹³ However, many experts believe that figure grossly overestimated. Overestimating the number of fellow activists Afghan community, according to experts, are trying to increase their visibility and importance to the Russian authorities.¹⁴

Estimates of the number of Afghans in Russia remain virtually unchanged in recent years. This indicates that the new mass influx of migrants from Afghanistan is not happening. Afghans living in Russia are

¹³ *Ivanova, T.* Is there a future for the Afghan refugees in Russia // *Ne prikosnovennii zapas. – 2004. - № 5(19)* // <http://www.strana-oz.ru/2004/5/est-li-budushchee-v-rossii-u-afganskikh-bezhencev>

¹⁴ *Kadiri, H.* Afghan diaspora in Russia // <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/19990.html>

divided into two categories: political refugees and labor migrants. The first group consists of representatives of the Afghan diaspora – come first and second waves of migration. The second group – the Afghans who come to Russia temporarily for work.

It is currently available information about dozens of legal, public organizations related to the Afghan community in Russia. A significant part of these organizations are based in Moscow and St. Petersburg. One of the major and painful stories in the Afghan community was the question of the lack of consolidation of the Afghan diaspora. Afghans are not consolidated around officially registered NGOs. There are religious and ethnic fragments Afghan community, consolidated around individual personalities and individual economic and business structures. The most powerful factor in the formation of separate groups and factions are the economic and business structure, based on which the Afghans make their living in Russia.

Russia in 1992 acceded to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, in its entirety. In the same year between the Russian Government and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) signed an agreement to open a representative office in Moscow Regional. Both instruments entered into force in 1993, but refugees from Afghanistan are still extremely difficult to be legalized in Russia.¹⁵

Afghans constituted the overwhelming majority of people who come from third world countries that had applied for refugee status in Russia. A senior Russian Office of Citizenship official noted that Afghan refugees for many years are the overwhelming majority (about 60-70%) of the total number of the application for refugee status in the Federal Migration Service.¹⁶

Only in 1997 – 2002 petitions filed about 15,000 Afghans. Refugee status in 1993 – 2002 received only 491. Legal status of the others is not regulated, and the government is considering these Afghan asylum

¹⁵ *Ivanova, T.* Is there a future for the Afghan refugees in Russia // *Nepriko snovennii zapas.* – 2004. – № 5(19) <http://www.strana-o-z.ru/2004/5/est-li-budushchee-v-rossii-u-afganskikh-bezhencev>

¹⁶ *Rucheikov, V.* Number of Afghans who want to come to Russia is growing // <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/14402.html>

seekers as illegal migrants. Authorities explain the small number of legalized Afghans lack of money to provide the guarantees, which the state is required by law to give refugees. Russia annually reduced total number of Afghan refugees. The highest point was in 1999 – 709 persons.¹⁷ The number of refugees decreased primarily due to the loss of status. According to the Law on Refugees status is granted only for three years and after that period, as a rule, its action is not extended.

Accurately answer the question, how many Afghans now living in Russia is difficult because not all Afghan citizens living in Russia legally. Over the past 5 years with an application for refugee status is asked 4689 people from Afghanistan. Of these refugees were found 395 persons.¹⁸

Experts estimate the prospects of staying in Russia Afghans controversial.¹⁹ If they will choice, the most of them prefer the West, because there were granted refugee status, they will have a strong social support. So there can be, despite the fact that psychologically they like Russia more than the West. But should the question to return home or to stay in Russia, they will prefer to Russia, as is here adapted and have a great integration potential. Return home is entirely dependent on stabilization of the political and economic situation in Afghanistan, and the forecasts of the situation remain pessimistic.

¹⁷ *Ivanova, T., Iastrebova, A.* Refugees from Afghanistan: social and legal issues stay on the territory of the Russian Federation // http://mos-ur.ru/articles.php?article_id=209

¹⁸ *Rucheikov, V.* Number of Afghans who want to come to Russia is growing / <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/14402.html>

¹⁹ *Ivanova, T., Iastrebova, A.* Refugees from Afghanistan: social and legal issues stay on the territory of the Russian Federation // http://mos-ur.ru/articles.php?article_id=209

Resumé

Afganskí utečenci v Strednej Ázii a v Ruskej federácii

Podľa medzinárodných štatistík v roku 2012 bolo na svete viac než 10 miliónov utečencov. Z tohto počtu takmer 2,7 milióna pripadalo na Afganistan. Krajina situovaná v centrálnej Ázii je v dôsledku aktuálnej spoločensko-politickej a militantnej situácie neustále konfrontovaná s problémom narastajúceho počtu utečencov. Už v roku 2011 bolo nútených hľadať azyl v okolitých krajinách o 34% viac Afgancov než v roku 2010. Väčšina z nich sa prechodne usídlila v štátoch Tadžikistan a Kazachstan, kde boli aj oficiálne zaregistrovaní. Masové vysťahovalectvo z Afganistanu začalo v roku 1980. Udialo sa tak takmer okamžite po sovietskej invázii do krajiny. Po skončení afgansko-sovietskej vojny podnietil pokračovanie vysťahovalectva v deväťdesiatych rokoch postupný nástup radikálnej organizácie Taliban. Rozdelení do niekoľkých vysťahovaleckých vln zamierili občania Afganistanu práve do Ruska. Sprievodným javom prisťahovalectva z Afganistanu do tejto krajiny sa preto musel stať rozvoj azylového a humanitárneho systému. V dnešnej dobe však napriek tomu neexistuje exaktná odpoveď koľko utečencov z Afganistanu v Ruskej federácii žije. Problematickou zložkou uvedeného problému sa stalo aj to, že európske a americké štáty zredukovali vládne programy podporujúce prijímanie utečencov z Afganistanu. Vedie to k dezilúzii množstva utečencov, ktorí z ekonomických príčin túžia po príchode do niektorého zo štátov západnej pologule. Ich návrat do vlasti je totiž závislý od stabilizácie pomerov v Afganistane.