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A LOOK AT AFGHANISTAN'S BRAIN DRAIN CRISIS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES



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Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)



A LOOK AT AFGHANISTAN'S BRAIN DRAIN CRISIS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

INTRODUCTION

The migration of people from one geography to another is a continuous and historical process based on which it can be said that human history is the history of migration and displacement. In the meantime, the issue of “human capital flight” or “brain drain” from developing countries to developed countries has caused the concern of less developed and developing societies more than any other time in recent years, which is a different and more important issue than normal immigration.

Third world countries are facing the opportunities and challenges of globalization in the post-Cold War era; because, on the one hand, they have to maintain their sovereignty and territorial integrity; on the other hand, they have to deal with the new hegemony and achieve economic and social development by using technology and information revolution. The important element in this process is the human force, which should be highly valued in the strategies of national security, political development, and economic development of the countries that need expert, professional and young human power.

Afghanistan is also one of the less developed countries, whose young, expert and productive human force migrates to different countries of the world every year. Unfortunately, this trend has taken an upward shape in recent years due to the reasons of war, political, economic and social instability and loss of opportunities. The [statistics](#) of 2020 shows that about 2.6 million Afghan were immigrants in different countries of the world at the end of this year. Among the Afghan immigrants in different countries of the world, most of them were economic immigrants. For instance, the [statistics](#) of 2015 show that out of 4.8 million Afghan immigrants at the end of that year, 2.2 million of them were economic immigrants.

The trend of brain drain and migration of Afghans in 2021 has been on the rise due to the fall of the previous government and the establishment of the interim government of the Islamic



Emirate. Only in the first six weeks after the fall of the republic, 124,000 people [left](#) Afghanistan during the evacuation operation, the absolute majority of whom were experts and educated people, and after that, tens of thousands of people left Afghanistan gradually.

Considering the importance of this issue for the development and political and economic stability of the country, in this article, in addition to explaining the concepts of brain drain and immigration, the causes and factors of human capital flight from Afghanistan and its short-term and long-term consequences are discussed.

WHAT IS HUMAN CAPITAL FLIGHT AND HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM IMMIGRATION?

The collective migration of human force from one country to another country or society has two main reasons: 1-People migrate from one country to another due to poverty, tyranny, unemployment, and social disruptions, which are called Push Factors. 2-Favorable conditions and factors of the receiving country or society also play a prominent role in the migration process, which are called Pull Factors that include health facilities, better education opportunities, more income, better housing, and political and social freedoms.

The term 'human capital flight' or 'brain drain' [refers](#) to the widespread migration of experts, skilled and educated people from one country or society to other countries and societies, which usually occurs due to the lack of jobs and job security, political and armed conflicts, and the lack of security guarantees.

Human capital flight is also considered a type of migration, during which experts and skilled people whose knowledge, expertise and technical skills are needed by the society prefer permanent migration to other countries for various reasons. According to this definition, the migration of forces whose expertise and skills are not needed by the society is not called human capital flight, but simply migration.



CAUSES AND FACTORS OF HUMAN CAPITAL FLIGHT IN AFGHANISTAN

Human Capital Flight in Afghanistan is not a new issue. Afghanistan has been struggling with the phenomenon of brain drain for a long time. What is important for us in the phenomenon of human capital flight is the investigation of the factors and causes that are mentioned below:

A. Political and Security Factors

- Lack of collective security: Unfortunately, collective security does not exist in Afghanistan. Political and economic competition, government intervention in the private sector and lack of effective support for them, lack of incentive programs and appreciation of elites, creators and inventors along with physical threats, personal enmities, and many others are all reasons and incentives of human capital flight from Afghanistan.
- Political instability: Governments in Afghanistan are changing one after the other. Change of a government in Afghanistan means the collapse of the entire system. When a government institution does not have stability and continuity, one cannot expect stability and durability from the people and society.
- The distance between the former and current forces and officials: despite the general amnesty by the leadership of the Islamic Emirate, the fear and anxiety of harassment and even assassination of some people by the lower circles still persists. Some people could not and cannot come to terms with the current situation due to working in different security positions of the previous regime. Therefore, they choose to leave the Country. In addition, the intellectual and ideological differences also cause this process to be faster than before.

B. Weakness in Governance

- Lack of meritocracy: handing over many jobs to people without relevant skills or expertise; or based on group, ethnic and language relations; mismatching of jobs with expertise of the job holders; government bureaucracy and monopolization of jobs are also factors that have helped the emigration of elites from the country over many years.
- Corruption: Systematic corruption has ruthlessly swallowed the powerful body of brotherhood and equality, nationalism and sense of loyalty to this land and has accelerated the engine of brain drain.



- Weakness of the force of attraction and strong force of repulsion: Unfortunately, the governments in Afghanistan have continuously enjoyed high force of repulsion and weak force of attraction. There is no doubt that it helps the process of brain drain when the governments cannot embrace their expert opponents and critics with an open forehead.
- Lack of national vision: Afghan governments, without exception, have never agreed on a strategy defined on the axis of national interests, as they have not provided a single definition of national interests.

C. Economic Factors

- Poverty and unemployment: certainly, one of the main factors that attract most of the intellectuals to other countries is the economic factors and poverty. When the salary of a specialist abroad is ten times the salary of the same person in Afghanistan, the majority of specialists will certainly think of migrating to foreign countries.
- Lack of job security: appointment and removal without rules and principles in government offices, especially after the interim government of the Islamic Emirate came to power, has made government offices unattractive to experts and associates.
- Strong presence of mafia in the field of politics and business: Politics and governance, business and private sector in Afghanistan have mostly been surrounded by the black circle of mafia and stained with the color of monopoly.
- Lack of planning in the field of infrastructure: until the work on the infrastructure starts and the country reaches the production stage, it is unlikely that the country's youth will enjoy job security.

D. Cultural Factors

- Globalization: Researchers claim that the process of globalization, expansion of knowledge, trade, technology, industry and its impact on the creation and expansion of the communication network has brought people closer to each other than before. For this reason, the identity of modern human, unlike the era of traditional rule, is not determined based on ethnicity or class, but “global identity” has replaced it, an identity that does not belong to a specific nation, region or country. The holders of this view believe that in the age of communication, brains and their owners are not the national heritage of countries, nor their native citizens, but are human heritage and global citizens.



- **Girls' education:** The lack of attention to the education of girls above the sixth grade in the last one year not only means neglecting the education of high school and middle school girls, but also a heavy blow to the morale of half of the Afghan population. Therefore, families in Afghanistan choose the path of migration to pay attention to the education of their families.

CONSEQUENCES OF HUMAN CAPITAL FLIGHT FROM AFGHANISTAN

If we evaluate human capital flight in a substantive and fundamental way, we can come to the conclusion that with the spread of the brain drain process, Afghanistan is losing its four basic and fundamental capitals:

Human Capital: The majority of elites who have taken the path of migration are educated and young generation. This young generation are young human forces who, with their hearts filled with pain and suffering, travel the path of migration in order to achieve a relatively secure future. The loss of this young force causes the country's energy and young potential to stagnate.

Spiritual Capital: There is no doubt that professors in the fields of humanities and experts in the fields of experimental sciences are Afghanistan's spiritual assets. Despite the high number of emigration in the past regimes, [new statistics](#) show that only since the interim government of the Islamic Emirate came to power in Afghanistan, 229 professors from the three major universities of Kabul, Herat and Balkh left the country. A large number of professors who left the mentioned three universities had master's or doctorate degrees. The number of Kabul University professors who have resigned has reached 112.

Material Capital: Undoubtedly, the educated generation of young people who have left the country for various reasons have achieved advanced degrees (bachelor's, master's and doctorate) spending millions of dollars of the Afghan nation. The migration of this generation is not only a moral or spiritual loss for Afghanistan, but it is definitely an irreparable material loss as well.

Increase in Hopelessness: When the country and people witness the escape of its elite, motive and hope for the future will decrease. When a student enters a classroom and sees the stage



empty of his professor, there is no doubt that he loses the motive and hope to study, work and serve the country. In the same way, the departure of businessmen from the country disappoints the investor, and the flight of scientists, experts, politicians... raises the level of despair in the country as a whole and in some way widens the gap between the government and the nation.

CONCLUSION

The continuation of human capital flight from the country, especially as it happened in the last one year, and more than this, the reduction of young, expert, and skilled human force in the country has a direct negative effect on the relatively stable internal order, methods of education, trade and market, work and dozens of other fields in the short and medium terms. In the long term, it makes the country more isolated from interactions with the world, and makes the country isolated in access to new technology and information in economic, political and cultural fields.

In such a sensitive historical situation and in order to move the wheel of economic and political activities, Afghanistan urgently needs young and experienced experts. The existing gaps in various academic, economic, political and technological sectors are extremely disappointing. Therefore, in order to prevent the escape of brains, the repulsive factors must be eliminated to at least prevent the flood of brains from escaping. In this case, the most important step is to give priority to meritocracy, expertise, commitment and experience in all employment fields, and along with that, creating job opportunities and reduction of the unemployment rate so that specialized and experienced people can be sure of their future in the country. Beside this, providing physical, mental and psychological security and providing the spirit of justice, brotherhood and equality among all the citizens of the country also plays an important role in preventing brain drain. Among them, we can name respecting the fundamental rights of people and freedoms in the light of Islamic laws and the work and education of girls.

Since the human capital flight from Afghanistan as a whole has caused a decrease in human capital in the country and hindered the country's economic growth and political and



social development, there is an urgent need for the formation of such government strategy to bring back and re-absorb skilled, educated and experienced people so that the people who return to the country do not have to worry about the uncertain future in the post-return stage.

The Centre for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) is an independent, non-profit, and non-governmental research organization established in July 2009 in Kabul. CSRS is committed to promoting policy-oriented research through conducting authentic and unbiased research concerning Afghanistan and the region.

Contact Us:Email: info@csrskabul.com - csrskabul@gmail.comWebsite: www.csrskabul.com - www.csrskabul.netPhone: **+93700033057**