

# Essays on conflict-related migration and development in the case of Afghanistan

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# Valorization

## **Background**

Popular interest in the relationship between migration and development has grown considerably over the last two decades. As a consequence, there has been more and more academic research on the subject which has explored the way in which these two fundamental processes interrelate in a diverse set of environments. A notable limitation, however, has been the focus on those dynamics associated with economic migration from low- to high-income countries. This has led to a gap in the empirical literature when it comes to migration between developing countries, otherwise considered South-South migration, and other less voluntary forms of migration like refugee movements from countries afflicted by conflict.

This dissertation is a collection of empirical essays which attempts to fill this gap by exploring the link between conflict-related migration and development in the (post-) conflict environment of Afghanistan. The analyses are quantitative in nature relying on two unique micro-level datasets seldom available for such a setting. As such, the dissertation as a whole contributes to the general discussion on migration and development by providing evidence in a conflict-affected context rarely covered in the literature, and if so from a purely qualitative perspective. In addition, the varied types of migration flows prevalent in the context of Afghanistan are also considered in different chapters – namely, international migration, return migration and internal displacement – providing a uniquely wide-ranging account of the Afghan case as it relates to conflict-related migration and development.

## **Relevance**

The real-world relevance of this work on the whole is evident once taking into consideration the significance of not only migration in general over recent time, but forced migration in particular. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, according to UNHCR there are more than 65 million individuals involuntarily displaced around the world representing the largest volume since World War II. Moreover, contrasting the popular image that countless refugees are flooding the shores of

developed countries, around 86 percent of that total currently resides in other developing nations. These stark figures put into plain view the necessity to build our knowledge base and understanding of migration that is not solely driven by economic motivations, and to do so in contexts not simply categorized by south-north trajectories.

This dissertation contributes to the building of that knowledge base by looking at both the causes of conflict-related migration and consequences for human development, as well as assessing a specific program targeting refugee returnees. In regards to the causes of conflict-related migration, Chapter 2 asks how household vulnerability might influence intentions to migrate. The application of a multidimensional vulnerability index is motivated by the notion that in an insecure setting like that of Afghanistan it is reasonable to assume a particularly fine line between voluntary and forced migration. As such, it is necessary to approach the subject through a broad spectrum which does not presuppose migration is strictly economic in nature, and takes into account both exposure to risk and lack of entitlements. The principal contribution is precisely this re-conceptualization of the underlying factors driving the motivation to migrate. While the concept of poverty is commonly used to investigate the causes of migration especially in contexts of labor migration, the use of this notion of vulnerability is both novel and appropriate given the systematic risks in the Afghan context.

Chapter 3 goes a step further, and investigates whether there is evidence of migration as a household risk-coping strategy. To do so, the analysis looks at the motivations behind remittance behavior differentiated by the way in which the migration episode was originally financed. By considering remittance behavior in relation to debt-financed migration in particular, it is possible to check for an implicit contractual agreement between migrant and household at origin which would suggest a household strategy. This study contributes to an extensive literature that focuses on testing a now well-established theoretical understanding of migration as a household arrangement, with direct implications for remittance behavior. However, it is the first to do so in the conflict-affected context of Afghanistan, which is argued to be relevant due to the high degree of insecurity and uncertainty over recent years.

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In relation to the consequences for human development, Chapter 4 examines the long-term consequences of displacement by inquiring how the younger generations within displaced households may fare in their particular circumstances. More specifically, outcomes arguably crucial for the healthy development of children are compared between households that have experienced internal displacement and those that have not. As a way to infer future livelihood prospects, these outcomes relate to human capital formation concentrating on both education and nutrition. The study contributes to a larger body of literature on the consequences of conflict, which routinely highlights displacement as a channel through which war may have an impact on human capital formation. Still, it is only in recent years that any empirical analysis has focused on displacement in particular, in contrast to war in general, and none in the context of Afghanistan.

In a similar line of inquiry concerning consequences, Chapter 5 considers the reintegration of return migrants into the Afghan labor market, exploring the occupational choice of returnees whose initial migration was due to conflict or general insecurity. The study is motivated by the fact that the reintegration of returnees greatly depends on their ability to access sustainable income-generating activities as a basis of their livelihood. The analytical approach is twofold: first, to compare non-migrants and return migrants in regards to what influences their respective occupational choices; and second, to investigate the influence of the returnees' migration and return experience on their occupational choice. The main contribution of this study is its focus on the return of those individuals whose original migration experience was due to concerns for safety, and as a result the insight concerning the labor market effect of forced migration and return. This is in contrast to the literature at large, where the attention is on the occupational choice of returnees who originally migrated to developed countries in search of employment.

Finally, the last study in this work reflects on a particular policy response related to conflict-related migration. Chapter 6 evaluates a shelter assistance program in Afghanistan mainly targeting returned refugees. The primary objective is to assess whether shelter assistance realizes the program's aims of improving socio-economic conditions and strengthening the livelihood potential of beneficiary households. To this end, a multidimensional approach to poverty measurement is adopted, one based upon three principal dimensions: economic welfare, health and

education, and basic services. From a practical point of view, this study provides the first judicious analysis of the largest shelter assistance program in Afghanistan, where the absence of basic shelter and land is routinely noted as a significant concern. From an academic perspective, it speaks to the literatures on refugee return, civil conflict and impact evaluation more generally.

### **Audience and Outreach**

Given the topical nature of this dissertation, it has the benefit of being both academically and policy relevant widening the potential target audience. From a scientific point of view, various individual chapters contribute to furthering our understanding of specific issues around conflict-related migration and development, including both the motivations behind migration in this specific context and impact it may have now and in the long-term. Such studies should be of particular interest for migration scholars as they provide empirical evidence linked to already established theories of migration and development, and put others into question. At the same time they also emphasize the need for further inquiry, both from a theoretical and empirical standpoint, into conflict-related migration. In addition, the application of a multidimensional framework in various studies should be of interest for scholars of poverty measurement who in just recent years are beginning to explore ways to empirically apply such an innovative framework. Alternatively, from a policy point of view the practical relevance of these studies and the specific populations under the microscope should be of interest to those organizations working with refugees, internally displaced populations, returnees and vulnerable groups more generally. Indeed, it is in the public sectors benefit to better understand the target populations they happen to work with in order to better serve them.

As for outreach, every study included this dissertation has been presented in a diverse set of forums in an effort not only to receive considerable feedback on early versions, but also to disseminate findings to a wider audience. Such forums include international conferences, seminars and specialized workshops which were comprised of both academics and more policy-focused experts. Furthermore, three of the studies included here have already been published in peer-reviewed journals, while a fourth is forthcoming in an edited book.