

THE ROUTE OF DUST AND SILENCE

The Endless Journey of Afghan Families

EDITORIAL KIN INSTITUTE



Winter in the Zagros mountains: the escape route between Iran and Turkey.

The desert between Iran and Turkey has no visible border markers at night. What defines it are the sounds: the wind cutting through the Zagros mountains, the distant barking of guard dogs, and the sound of military boots stepping on dry earth. For thousands of Afghan families, this invisible border

is the dividing line between the oppression they flee from and a nightmare they could not foresee.



Since August 2021, when the Taliban retook control of Kabul, Afghanistan has plunged into a humanitarian abyss. But years have passed, the world's cameras have turned to other wars, and the Afghan crisis has become a continuous silence. Girls are still banned from attending secondary schools — more than 2 million young women condemned to forced illiteracy.

Fleeing, for many, is not a political choice; it is a survival instinct. They are not going to Europe in search of the "Western dream." They are running to save their lives. But the escape route has become a corridor of horrors orchestrated by militias and human traffickers.

THE FEAR THAT PUSHES

To understand why a family decides to hand over their savings and lives to smugglers, one must understand what they leave behind. Nargina, whose husband repaired armored vehicles for the previous Afghan government, saw her family placed on the Taliban's target list. Staying in Kabul meant waiting for the knock on the door at night [1].



Nargina walks with her children before dawn. The fear that pushes.

Hunger is the other executioner. Winter in the Afghan mountains kills as much as bullets. Given this scenario, the smugglers' promise of safe passage to Iran, and then to Turkey, sounds like the only possible salvation.

THE KIDNAPPING INDUSTRY

It is on the Iran-Turkey border that the true brutality of the route is revealed. Human trafficking networks do not just operate as clandestine guides; many function as kidnapping and extortion syndicates.

Violence does not only come from state forces. Gangs frequently kidnap entire groups of migrants. Nargina and the families traveling with her were intercepted. Criminals confiscated their belongings and tied the men's hands. For four days, the men were subjected to extreme torture [1].

"THEY SAID: YOU ARE IN HELL AND THERE IS NO GOD TO SAVE YOU. THEY USED A LIGHTER TO HEAT THE BLADE OF A KNIFE... RIGHT IN FRONT OF US."

The goal of this barbarity is financial. Criminals film the torture and send the videos to relatives in Afghanistan or Europe, demanding exorbitant ransoms. In Nargina's case, after relatives sent \$18,000, the families were abandoned in the middle of the Iranian desert [1].



The Sistan-Baluchestan desert, where many are left to their own devices.

THE DEPORTATION BOOMERANG

For those who manage to cross the borders, the relief is temporary. Iran and Pakistan have drastically intensified their deportation campaigns. In 2025, according to Amnesty International, more than 2.6 million Afghans were illegally expelled by these two countries alone [3].

Deportation is not just a matter of logistics; it is a sentence of imminent danger. Returning to Afghanistan under Taliban control means returning to a country where basic human rights have been erased.



Makeshift camps on the borders: the endless wait in the cold.

"IT IS NOT A CHOICE"

"It is important for the world to understand that this is not a choice. We do this to stay alive." The closure of legal asylum routes turns migration into a black market where the currency is human pain. Hearing the voices of these families is understanding the absence of alternatives [1].

The route from Afghanistan to Turkey is not just a geographical path; it is a cemetery of hopes and a monument to the international community's failure to protect the most vulnerable.

Every Number Has a Face.

We are not a rescue organization. We are the information that arrives,
before the danger.

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