



# HUMAN MIGRATION

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**HUMAN MIGRATION.** This subject includes three types of human migration in modern Iran: (1) migration within the country; (2) immigration of foreign nationals to Iran; and (3) emigration of Iranians to foreign countries.

*i. Internal migration.*

*ii. Immigration.*

*iii. Emigration:* see [DIASPORA](#) [viii](#) and [x](#).

## i. INTERNAL MIGRATION

The cornerstone of the concept of migration is the geographical difference between place of birth and place of residence. On this basis it is possible to measure the relative volume of migratory currents and geographical mobility of populations in Persia as of the first general census of 1956, which indicates that 11 percent of the total population could be considered migratory and geographically mobile. (In the census of 1996, however, “place of birth” was dropped from the questionnaire; and, as a result, lifetime migrants could no longer be quantified.)

Another parameter for gauging regional migration is the difference between the actual rate of increase in a given region over a period of time, compared to the expected natural increase for that particular region. For instance, in the



period between 1956 and 1966 the rates of population increase for urban and rural areas were 5.41 percent and 1.61 percent, respectively, whereas the annual rate of population increase as a whole was 3.13 percent. It may, therefore, be deduced that during this decade urban areas were zones of immigration, while rural areas represented zones of emigration.

Among urban areas, Tehran was a pole of immigration long before the first general census of 1956. As early as 1869, a census of Tehran carried out by Mirzā ‘Abd-al-Ġaffār Najm-al-Molk indicated that 73 percent of the inhabitants were migrants and had come from other regions (*Amār-e dāru’l-ḳalāfa-ye Tehrān*, ed. S. Sa’dvandiān and M. Eteḥādiyeh, Tehran, 1989, p. 347). As a result of this high level of immigration, up to 1976, the rate of increase of population in Tehran surpassed the natural rate of increase of population. This trend, however, was largely reversed in the decade 1976-86, especially after the Islamic Revolution and the ensuing lengthy and devastating war with Iraq. During the two decades 1976-86 and 1986-96, the rate of growth of the population of Tehran dropped to 2.9 percent and 1.2 percent from 5.2 percent and 6.1 percent in the two preceding decades, as shown in [Table 1](#).

Other large cities also catered to sizeable migrations in Persia up to and including the 1976-86 decade; the high rates of increase of population confirmed the pattern of geographical mobility toward the cities. In the following decade, however, the pattern of growth was considerably modified ([Table 2](#)).

The decline in the rate of growth of the population of large cities was mainly brought about by a decrease in its natural growth, as well as by the decline in emigration towards the cities. This trend was most marked in Mašhad, while Ahvāz was least affected; the rate of growth of its population was highest among the big cities. As the war came to an end, many who were displaced by war went back home to Ḳuzestān. At the same time, most rural immigrants could not return to their villages, because the war-stricken villages were still unready to receive them. Comparison of population growth in these cities in the two decades 1976-86 and 1986-96 also at least partially confirms the effectiveness of the family-planning policy and its consequences upon rural emigration.

On the other hand, comparison of the rates of increase of population in Persia as a whole with the rates of increase of population in urban and rural areas shows a strong wave of rural-urban emigration up to 1976, as shown in [Table](#)



## 3.

It is important to point out that the high level of rural emigration to urban areas in the decade 1976-86 was essentially brought about by the war, with war refugees leaving villages occupied by the invading forces. However, in the period 1986-96, as the war ended, there was a movement in the opposite direction from urban areas back to rural areas. Hence, all conclusions concerning population movements based on these figures have been treated within the context of the effects of the Iran-Iraq war on migration trends in Iran during the period.

Two other elements have to be taken into account for comparing census statistics as regards the growth of rural and urban populations; these are (1) definition of the city and (2) merger of villages into the cities. Up to the census of 1976 “village” was defined as a settlement with a population of less than 5,000 persons, while later censuses defined it in terms of the administrative criterion: settlements with no municipality. This change in itself accounts for an overestimation of the urban population in 1986 by more than 1.4 million persons. Many villages also merged into the cities as the population grew.

Statistical surveys carried out in between the 10-year censuses pay greater attention to the question of migration; they also fill in the gaps. [Table 4](#) shows the direction of four types of migration from 1986 to 1996 based on these sample surveys, as well as census data.

It can readily be observed from comparing 1986 with 1996 statistics that rural migration (to the city or to other rural areas) declined and urban migration (to other cities or to rural areas) increased. The counter-trend in the 1991 and 1993 rural out-migration figures must have been due to the return to their homes of those who were displaced by war. It is worth pointing out that the number of domestic migrants increased from 4.8 million people in the period 1976-86 to 8.5 million in the period 1986-96, representing an increase of 77 percent (Zanjāni, 2001, pp. 101, 104), whereas the growth of population from 1986 to 1996 was just over 22 percent.

On the whole, the migratory movement from rural to urban areas, which amounted to 31.9 percent in 1986, dropped to 22.4 percent in 1996, while at the same time the urban to urban migratory movement increased rapidly and the movement of population from urban areas towards rural areas also increased. We may note that the overall geographical mobility of the population



continuously increased from 11 percent in the 1956 census to 25.3 percent in the 1991 survey. It declined, for the first time, to 24.1 percent, as observed in the 1993 survey. (As was pointed out above, because the question “place of birth” was dropped from the 1996 census, the comparative figure for that year can not be calculated.)

The pattern of these migratory movements and the geographical mobility of the population may be observed in [Table 5](#).

It is also worth noting that between 1976 and 1986 there was a surge in migration of women in several sub-categories (e.g., to rural areas within the provincial limits and between cities in different provinces). The explanation must also have to do with the effects of the war, forcing women to flee the war zone on their own or seek more favorable social and economic conditions elsewhere. Pursuing their education where it was more easily available and seeking suitable work may also be considered as possible factors in explaining the greater geographical mobility of women. Between 1986 and 1996 this trend was reversed and became normal, as male migration surpassed female migration.

## ii. IMMIGRATION

According to the 1996 census, there were about one million (55 percent men and 45 percent women) immigrants in Persia, for the most part Afghans—undoubtedly a considerable underestimate. Since these immigrants spoke the same language as the majority of Persians, it is quite possible that a part of them declared themselves, or were considered to be, Persian during the survey. In that case, there must surely have been more than one million Afghans in Persia, who fled the war with the former Soviet Republic, which was followed by civil war, and decided to seek shelter in an adjacent country with a similar culture and religion and an almost identical language.

According to a count carried out by the Ministry of Interior (*Wezārat-e kešvar*) of Afghan and Iraqi immigrants in 2002, there were some 2.57 million foreign immigrants (51 percent men and 39 percent women) in Persia, of which more than 90 percent (or 2.3 million) were Afghans (Aḥmadi-Mowaḥedi, pp. 44-45; [Table 6](#)).

The breakdown of the structure of immigrants by age-group seems to indicate that, in the eight censuses and surveys from 1956 to 2002, only the external



immigration between 1976 and 1986 was composed of households accompanied by children. Between 1976 and 1986, the percentage of 0 to 19-year-old immigrants reached the unprecedented figure of 46.2 percent of total immigrants (this figure fell to 30.2 percent between 1986 and 1996). This rejuvenation of age structure naturally accounts also for the average age reaching its lowest in this period, i.e., 24.

Perhaps if the ratio of males among the immigrants were the same as that of the Persian population in 1986 (about 105 men for 100 women), that is, if there were a lower ratio of male immigration than what is in fact observed (132 men for 100 women), then the immigrant proportion in the 0 to 19-year-old age-group and the average immigrant age might have approached that of the Persian population. The two sets of parameters below ([Table 7](#)) each may illustrate a constant demographic relationship.

It is worth noting that, according to the Registration Bureau (*Sāzemān-e t'ābt-e aḥwāl*), in 1991 a total of 3,230,000 Afghans and 467,000 Iranian returnees from Iraq (adding up to some 3,700,000) were registered in Persia. A great number of them are still living in Persia. Nevertheless, many immigrants, especially Afghans, have left the country. In fact, more than 1,500,000 Afghans are estimated to have returned to their country since 1991. According to the Immigration Department of the Ministry of Interior, in August 1995 the total number of refugees in Persia was 2,300,000—1,500,000 of whom were Afghan. The decline in the percentage of foreign population from 1.8 percent in 1986 to 1.6 percent in 1991 and 1 percent in 1993 could confirm this outmigration (see also [DIASPORA x](#)).

There is no doubt that the figures for foreign immigrants have been consistently under-reported in the censuses. This hypothesis is confirmed by the United Nations estimate of foreign immigrants in Iran between 1985 and 1993, given below.

According to the censuses the number of foreign nationals living in Persia in 1986 and 1996 amounted to 865,000 and 1,005,000 persons respectively, which should be about one-fourth or one-third of the real number ([Table 8](#)).

Afghanistan, which ranked first in immigration to Persia in 1996, had occupied tenth place in 1956. Iraq's position in second place did not change. For the origins of foreign immigrants to Persia in 1956 and 1996, see [Table 9](#). (Only these two censuses give the origins of the immigrants.)



Table 10 shows the first six provinces in which most of the immigrants had settled in 1986 and 1996. Because of the proximity of the provinces of Khorasan and Baluchistan to Afghanistan most of the immigrants from this country have settled there.

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