Drivers of Illegal International Migration from Iran: The Case of Sardash County

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Abstract

Illegal immigration has become a problem of global proportions as it affects a myriad of factors including international relations, security, demographics, social fabric, culture, and economies of origin, transiting, and destination countries. Although illegal immigration has, for some time, been a problem in some places like Iran's border areas, its prominence as a major type of immigration has only recently emerged, eliciting unprecedented empirical investigations. This study focuses in on Sardasht county as a sui-generis case in Iran to understand the reasons behind this emerging trend. The study employs a qualitative methodology, in-depth interviewing 52 subjects, and identifies the existence of a range of structures that have both motivational and deterrent effects, albeit the balance of the structures in this case is motivation in Sardasht. The study shows clearly the interplay of structures and agency; they give rise to the concept of survival strategy.

Keywords: Illegal migration, Survival strategy, Structure-agency, Migration drivers, Sardash County

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, international migration has been growing as one of the most determining factors of population changes and movements (IOM, 2021). Its rapid expansion has brought with it phenomena such as migrant smuggling (Bilecen, 2009), smuggling networks, and the migration industry (Mohammadi & Sadeghi, 2019; İçduygu, 2021). Today, illegal migration has become a global issue that has affected international relations, security, demographic and social structures, culture, and economy of countries of origin, transit countries, and destination countries. According to data from the International Organization for Migration, most migrants are headed to countries with very high levels of human development. According to available evidence, while the entry of people to developed countries through regular and legal migration routes is problematic, illegal routes have emerged as the main option for migration to these countries (IOM, 2021).

Estimates over the past four decades indicate that migration from Iran to other countries has not only continued but also expanded (Azadi et al., 2020). Although most migrations after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 were for political reasons, in the last three decades, "economic reasons" have taken over (İçduygu, 2021; Lizama, 2011; IOM, 2021; Koser Akcapar, 2010). However, in recent years, due to some social unrest,

migration for political and security reasons (both personal and professional) has increased again.

Based on studies conducted within Iran, migration patterns in different regions of Iran are affected by different factors and motivations, considering the unbalanced levels of development and unequal economic opportunities (Sadeghi, 2022), and based on different ethnic groups and religions (Sadeghi et al., 2018). Meanwhile, Kurds, as one of the multi-million ethnic groups, live in four provinces in Iran's western and northwestern regions. International migration of Kurds in Iran is significant. Once, due to political and military conflicts after the revolution, it has appeared in a new guise in the last decade, affected by economic, social, and, of course, political conditions. There are no exact statistics on this migration, but evidence of these migration flows can be seen at the local level.

Meanwhile, one of the areas with the most migration to abroad is Sardasht County. This county is involved in various types of conventional and unconventional migration. This county has a special and unique spatial, livelihood, cultural, and economic situation. According to field observations in Sardasht County, its districts, rural districts, and villages, there is rarely a family that has not had a member migrate unconventionally. For several years, the wave of migration from Sardasht County has been ongoing continuously. The discontented people of that land initially sought refuge in European countries to escape the dire economic situation, perhaps to earn a living. A decade has passed since the wave of illegal immigration from Sardasht began, but even though they have drowned at sea, suffocated in cars, and been imprisoned in exile, no one has seen them, written about them, or thought of a solution for them. Until today, immigration from Sardasht has entered a new phase. The people of that land still migrate, but migration has become an integral part of their social life.

In today's Sardasht, migration has not only expanded but also changed its meaning and concept. Why such a wave of migration has occurred in this city is a big question mark for anyone who enters it and walks along its ring road. This study aims to qualitatively examine the key drivers of migration in this city, particularly over the past decade. The main question is: what conditions (historical, social, economic, and political) have paved the way for the emergence of illegal migration from Sardasht to Europe?

THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS

In migration, the conditions for pioneer migrants are always more difficult than for potential migrants who have social networks at the destination. They will face high risks and costs (Haug, 2008). However, they will decide to leave their homes and move, temporarily or permanently, to distant or nearby lands. Researchers have examined the reasons for initiating such actions from different angles. In this study, in line with its purpose, relevant theories will be briefly reviewed to increase theoretical sensitivity.

Neoclassical economic theory, as one of the oldest approaches to international migration, applies the supply-and-demand framework to migration. According to this theory, differences in labor supply and demand across regions drive migration. Neoclassicals pay attention to both the macro and micro levels.

According to neoclassical macroeconomics, wages will be low countries with a surplus of labor relative to the market. On the other hand, wages will be high in

countries with a limited labor force relative to the market. The resulting wage differential causes workers to move from low-wage countries to higher-wage countries. Accordingly, many researchers link the current trend of illegal migration to broader economic transformations that have affected both sending and receiving societies in recent decades (Echeverria, 2020). On the other hand, neoclassical microeconomics focused on the role of migrant agency. This model assumes that potential migrants estimate the costs and benefits of migrating to other locations and migrate to the location with the highest economic return. These costs include material costs of travel (e.g., transportation, accommodation), information and search costs (e.g., identifying potential jobs), opportunity costs (i.e., income foregone due to migration), and psychological costs (the anxiety and stress of leaving a familiar environment and moving to an unfamiliar one) (Stark, 1984).

Theoretical accounts that have focused on the role of immigrants offer different accounts of the extent to which immigrants have agency in confronting and challenging social structures. For some scholars, immigrant agency is primarily limited in its capacity to confront structural forces. For others, agency is a much more powerful force capable of contesting and even reforming social structures (Echeverria, 2020). Everett Lee formulated this theoretical model to modify Rawls's model and develop a general theory for analyzing internal and international migration (Lee, 1966). In his article, "Theory of Migration," he considers migration to be driven by repulsive and attractive factors in both the origin and the destination. He also refers to the role of intervening barriers and is aware of the influence of individual factors. He believes that migration is a matter of choice, in which individuals decide to migrate based on evaluations of factors in the origin and destination.

There are valuable points in Lee's theoretical model that can increase the theoretical sensitivity in this research. For example, according to his theoretical model, attractive factors (positive, +) and repulsive factors (negative, -) exist in both the origin and destination regions. In other words, in each region, there are many positive factors that not only prevent the migration of its own people. However, they will even attract foreign people from other regions to the desired region. On the other hand, there are other factors that not only do not attract people from other regions but also repel people from their own community. In addition to the two positive and negative factors, Lee also identifies neutral factors (ineffective; 0) at the origin and destination in his theoretical model. Neutral factors are factors that people are basically indifferent to and have no effect on the migration decision of individuals, neither at the destination nor at the origin (Lee, 1966).

According to Lee's theory, while migration may result from a comparison of factors at origin and destination, a simple calculation of positive and negative factors alone does not lead an individual to the decision-making stage of migration. Accordingly, Lee points out that there is a set of barriers that may be surmountable in some cases and impassable in others (ibid.). Finally, regarding the importance of the individual role, Lee goes so far as to say: "It is not only the actual factors of origin and destination, but also the perception of these factors that cause migration." It is individuals who, with their intelligence and awareness, compare the conditions of origin and destination and decide whether to migrate (ibid.).

Furthermore, new economics of migration suggests that migration decisions are not made by individuals, but rather by larger units of individuals, usually households or families, who decide to send some family members to work in

international labor markets in order to maximize the expected income of the household/family. These families can rely on remittances from migrants if their economic conditions deteriorate and they do not earn enough (Stark & Bloom, 1985). New economic theorists argue that families send their individuals abroad not only to improve their absolute income, but also because of a sense of "relative deprivation" (Timmerman et al, 2014). It should be noted that, according to this theory, wage differences between countries are not a necessary condition for international migration. Instead, even in the absence of wage differences, families may still have strong incentives to have their members move transnationally (Taifi, 2017).

Network theory is one of the theories proposed to explain this situation. According to this theory, migrants create networks that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants at both the origin and the destination. When the number of migrants reaches a significant size, the expansion of networks reduces the costs of movement. The costs of migration are expensive for initial migrants who move to a new destination and have no network. However, after the departure of the first migrants, the potential costs of migration for remaining friends and relatives decrease significantly. When the number of network connections in the origin area reaches a significant level, migration is self-perpetuating because each new migrant reduces the costs of subsequent migration for a set of friends and relatives (Hung, 2008).

However, Schinkel criticizes this theory, noting that the focus on networks has, in many cases, led to the underestimation of political and economic structures. He acknowledges that reports that attribute the capacity for widespread structural transformation to illegal migration and underestimate the role of states seem unrealistic (Schinkel, 2009). On the other hand, the tendency to separate the analysis of illegal migration from its structural contexts has led to broad conceptualizations of illegal migration as a general phenomenon. However, illegal migration takes different forms and characteristics in different contexts. Moreover, even within a single context, changes in structural conditions have led to changes in the strategies adopted by migrants or even in their aspirations (Van Meeteren, 2010).

In general, according to this theory, the causes of international migration are the lack of government programs to support families, the lack of social security insurance for all members of society, especially the lower class, and the risks in this regard, and it claims that families seek to reduce such risks through migration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic research on illegal migration is relatively new, having begun in the second half of the 1990s, and since then it has developed in two waves. In the first wave, much of it was policy-oriented, linking smuggling to illegal migration and emphasizing its criminalization and illegality. These studies viewed illegal migration not as a reaction to the consequences of border control policies and practices but as a cause. After the first wave of studies, there is an intermediate period from the second half of the 2000s to the early 2010s, when the first generation of research reached a more mature stage. During this period, academic research increased its efforts to understand migrant smuggling better and moved from exploratory and descriptive studies to explanatory ones. Finally, the mid-2010s saw the emergence of the second wave of academic research. New studies adopted a more critical stance. They questioned the logic of criminalizing migrant smuggling. And finally, they interpreted and analyzed migrant smuggling from broader social, political, and economic perspectives (İçduygu, 2021).

In light of what has been said, recent studies, on the one hand, consider illegal migration to be the product of contextual, socio-institutional, and transnational factors. On the other hand, they consider the role of micro- and meso-level factors, including a wide range of interactions among migrants, families, friends, and smugglers, to be important. However, problems related to data collection, ambiguity in definitions, and different approaches of countries to this demographic phenomenon have further complicated the issue, leading to different and sometimes contradictory interpretations of this demographic phenomenon.

Fassmann and Münz (1994) listed the three main reasons for stimulating mass migration from Eastern Europe to Western Europe as the industrial revolution (with increased production), differences in political systems (with liberal attitudes and freedom from law), and the emergence of violent nationalism in Eastern Europe (with religious and minority pressures) (Fassmann & Münz, 1994). Liang and Song (2018) showed that in Fujian society, immigrants have high social status and value, and that most parents are proud of their children and family members who migrate abroad. They use remittance information to enhance their sense of pride (Liang & Song, 2018). Rosberg and Tronvoll (2017) consider the reasons for Eritrean migration to be escape from forced labor, arbitrary imprisonment, and ill-treatment, and lack of public freedom (Rosberg & Tronvoll, 2017). Another area of increasing desire and action to migrate is the feeling of relative poverty among people. When individuals compare their income with others' and realize their income is lower than others', they may feel poor. On this basis, family members may migrate not necessarily to increase the absolute income of the household, but to improve the household's position (in terms of relative poverty) with respect to a specific reference group (Stark et al., 2009).

The factors and motivations in studies that target (conventional) migration from Iran share similarities and differences with those in studies examining the factors and motivations affecting illegal migration. The impact of macro-level factors on both dimensions of conventional and illegal migration is clear, but there are also differences in the degree of influence across the two. For example, Renani et al. (2014) examined the role of economic, institutional, political, and quality-of-life factors in migration from Iran. The results of their study showed that the most influential factors in migration from Iran were quality of life, institutional factors, and political factors. Among the factors mentioned, the quality-of-life factor had the most tremendous impact, and an interesting result in this study was that differences in per capita income, as an economic indicator, did not affect migration (Renani et al., 2014). On the contrary, studies have also shown that recent waves of migration from Iran (after the revolution) are more economic and less political in nature (Koser Akcapar, 2006). He also points to the study by Khosrokhavar & Roy (1999), which shows that young Iranians born in Iran after the revolution but living in a larger global world have become more dissatisfied. In fact, conservative neo-fundamentalism has failed to offer anything to its young population (ibid.).

However, research on illegal migration to and from Iran suggests otherwise. Ichdugu's (2020) emphasizes the influence of political factors, acknowledges that migrant smuggling should not be challenging to observe during humanitarian crises. Although smuggling should not be reduced to humanitarian flows alone, various forms of migrant smuggling are often a direct result of crises. Crises such as the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the Iranian Revolution of 1957, and the Iran-Iraq War are among the events that have had a direct impact on migration movements in Asia in

the last few decades. He shows that the social ties of the vast majority of Iranian migrants in Turkey were weakened before migration and that the exodus began in Iran due to a combination of political, social, economic, religious, and other factors. For example, one of the main reasons cited for migration to Turkey was to escape religious pressure and social restrictions in Iran. In his book, Baklacioglu (2013) links the factors influencing the waves of Iranian immigration to Turkey to social and cultural issues (exclusion of LGBT people) and the patriarchal legal system (domestic violence, divorce, and child custody) in addition to political factors (the 1999 student uprising or the 2009 elections) (Baklacioglu, 2013).

DATA AND METHOD

The method used in this research is qualitative and ethnographic. The ethnographic method used in this research is a broad ethnography, in which the researcher seeks to use any data to discover and analyze the phenomenon (Mohammadpour, 2013). In this research, the researcher has entered the field in Sardasht County at different stages and for different periods of time, and has collected his data.

The community under study is Sardasht County, located in the southwest of West Azerbaijan Province and bordering Iraqi Kurdistan. Its population is ethnically Kurdish, and they are Sunni Muslims. Sardasht is located at the border point (distance to Iraqi Kurdistan is 14 km).

The primary method of data collection in this study was semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview was conducted in Kurdish. Before entering the research field, the researcher prepared questions related to the research topic as an interview guide and asked them sequentially during the interview. Each interview lasted an average of 50 minutes. In addition to the interviews, the first author also used the observation method. The observation units were all places, ceremonies, or situations related to migration and immigrants. The first author sought to increase his understanding of migration in this region by attending weddings and funerals of migrants who had died during migration, going to the terminal and seeing off migrants, visiting sensitive migration villages (Biuran, Qaleh-Rash, Kolesi, Golineh, Maraghan, Bijouy), going to the city cemeteries, and visiting the graves of those who died during migration.

The basis for determining the sample size in this study was data saturation. The statistical population of the study was actually individuals and groups who had the most experience and knowledge of the phenomenon of illegal immigration, namely, families of illegal immigrants, people who immigrated and live outside of Iran, deported immigrants, and even people who did not have an immigrant in their family or people who intended to immigrate illegally. After conducting 45 interviews, data saturation was nearly achieved, but to ensure greater certainty, the number of interviews was increased to 52. The inclusion criteria for the sample were: awareness of the issue of migration in Sardasht (including knowledgeable individuals such as teachers, clergy, and civil activists), willingness to be interviewed, having someone abroad, individuals interested in migrating or with a migration program, and, finally, the migrants themselves. The demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in the table below. Table 1 shows a very diverse range of participants.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants in the study

No.	Nickname	Age	Sex	Marital status	No.	Nickname	Age	Sex	Marital status
1	Aram	23	Man	Single	27	Mahdi	27	Man	Single
2	Omid	37	Man	Married	28	Pishva	58	Man	Married
3	Ebrahim	41	Man	Married	29	Navid	33	Man	Single
4	Shahla	38	Woman	Married	30	Younes1	29	Man	Married
5	Esmaiel	28	Man	Single	31	Ali	71	Man	Married
6	Hawal	31	Man	Married	32	Berham	26	Man	Single
7	Yosef1	29	Man	Married	33	Kaveh	36	Man	Single
8	Ako	33	Man	Single	34	Yones2	27	Man	Married
9	Hawjin	40	Woman	Married	35	Mohamad1	24	Man	Single
10	Shirin	29	Woman	Single	36	Pishro	30	Man	Single
11	Abdolah	75	Man	Married	37	Katan	28	Woman	Married
12	Akar	15	Man	Single	38	Rahim	37	Man	Married
13	Ghane	15	Man	Single	39	Shahoo	48	Man	Married
14	Chia	13	Man	Single	40	Showan	37	Man	Married
15	Mohamad2	13	Man	Single	41	Mahmoud	40	Man	Married
16	Arman	33	Man	Single	42	Mamosta	43	Man	Married
17	Akam	31	Man	Single	43	Mohamad3	29	Man	Single
18	Hataw	68	Woman	Widow	44	Hajar	53	Woman	Married
19	Ahmad	41	Man	Married	45	Karim	58	Man	Married
20	Zankoo	29	Man	Single	46	Hiero	26	Woman	Single
21	Niean	26	Woman	Single	47	Seeran	31	Woman	Married
22	Amenh	65	Woman	Widow	48	Hiwa	31	Man	Married
23	Bapir	37	Man	Married	49	Yosef2	37	Man	Married
24	Rezgar	31	Man	Single	50	Amanj	46	Man	Married
25	Zhiwar	36	Man	Single	51	Galawij	64	Woman	Married
26	Mehri	16	Woman	Single	52	Hajar	36	Man	Married

In this study, various non-probability sampling techniques were used, including purposive, snowball, and opportunistic/emergent sampling. To begin with, informed samples were targeted, and individuals who were well-informed about the research topic were interviewed as "informants" or "gatekeepers" in the very first step. In the next step, due to limited knowledge among the population, non-probability snowball sampling was used. In this method, because identifying group members was difficult, several individuals from the sample were first interviewed. Then they were asked for the names and addresses of other individuals with the desired characteristics. This method was mainly used to establish contact with immigrants. In this method, each immigrant was asked to introduce several people if possible. Since the network of immigrants from Sardasht was very extensive. Each immigrant introduced several people from whom the researcher, having specific criteria that were important to the researcher - age, education, number of years of immigration - selected the best option among them. Finally, the researcher used non-probability, opportunistic, or emergent sampling to add new cases to the original sample in the research design.

FINDINGS

Drivers of international migration refer to conditions and structural factors whose presence or absence has a direct/indirect, negative/positive relationship with the motivation to migrate. In other words, these conditions are intended to list concepts related to the question of what factors made people think about migrating in the first place. It should be noted that although individual characteristics affect migration decisions, this study examines the impact of macro structures on migration decisions among residents of Sardasht County.

The concepts that guided the research in this section towards the primary category of "survival strategy" include geography and space, the effects of the state, the effects of the economy, culture and tradition, and the effects of history. Each of these subcategories is a product of the more concrete concepts of the initial level of research coding. See Table 2.

GEOGRAPHICAL DRIVING FORCES

Geography has always been considered one of the essential factors of migration or a strong motivation for permanent settlement. Everywhere in the world, flat land, abundant water resources, and a suitable climate reinforce the idea of "staying". In contrast, natural disasters, water shortages, and a poor geographical location reinforce the concept of "leaving". But the story in Sardasht County is different and more complicated than what was mentioned. The people of Sardasht refer to their land and soil as "mother" or "our homeland". The concept of land has a different, more significant meaning for them than "a place to live". Despite harsh climatic conditions, rugged terrain, and low agricultural land, they have never been willing to leave that land throughout history. This is because the land has always been the site of significant political unrest due to its specific geographical location. However, whenever political unrest occurred in this region, the people of that land stayed and never left their "homeland" alone. They think like 75-year-old Abdullah: "Our homeland is the mother of us all." This sense of patriotism is one of the most important reasons people resist accepting immigrants.

But what has caused such patriotic people to be willing to accept the phenomenon of illegal immigration? To answer such questions, the following text will describe and explain the subcategories extracted from interviews with the city's residents.

"The dead end of Sardasht" is one of those cases that, in addition to affecting the rate of migration from Sardasht, has also affected the meaning of the concept of the border for the people of Sardasht. This concept results from the simultaneous effects of the two elements, "distance" and "connection," between Sardasht County and its neighboring counties. It is worth noting that Sardasht County is 14 kilometers from the border with Iraqi Kurdistan and 35 kilometers from Raniyeh County. This is while the closest city on the Iranian side is Baneh County, 67 kilometers away. Therefore, based on one of Ravenstein's Laws- the shorter the distance, the more commuting and migration - the people of Sardasht have had more contact and association with the cities of Iraqi Kurdistan than with the cities of Iran since ancient times. They have traded with them and have come to each other's aid in times of crisis and displacement. In such circumstances, for the people of Sardasht, the meaning of the border will differ from its literal meaning as a "political border". The 58-year-old leader says:

In fact, we consider these borders to be physical, and the Kurds of Iraq are our brothers, our relatives, our fellow speakers, and our fellow believers.

These connections have ultimately led to the formation of "cultural similarities." The 19-year-old, whose family, including his older brother, lives in Iraqi Kurdistan, and who still enters Iraqi Kurdistan on foot through a rural road due to not having a passport, stays for a few weeks, and then re-enters Sardasht on foot, says with a sweet smile:

I spend half the year in southern Kurdistan and the other half in eastern Kurdistan. All the social, political, cultural, and even linguistic customs of the people of Sardasht are similar to those of the people of Pishtad.

The cultural similarities the pioneer pointed out, and which several other respondents confirmed, gave rise to another important concept: the "illegal migration triangle." The illegal migration triangle refers to the similarities among the three counties of Raniyeh and Qala-e-Dzeh in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and Sardasht County in Iranian Kurdistan, which form the triangle's third corner. The structures that govern these areas, like the Bermuda Triangle, swallow their youth through the whirlpool of illegal migration and disperse them to distant lands. Navid, 34, who works as a translator in England for illegal immigrants, says:

In the last few years I have lived here, 90% of the Kurds living here are from one of these three regions.

According to residents, illegal migration began in Qaladzeh and Raniyeh, and later spread to Sardasht. Informants consider the turning points of the illicit migration from Iraqi Kurdistan to Europe to be the war with ISIS in 2014 and the referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2017.

After the referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Iranian government closed the borders of Sardasht. One of the consequences of this government action was an influx of immigrants from the Poshtdar region into the border villages of Sardasht County, which to this day are still referred to as centers of illegal immigration from Sardasht County. Zanko, a 29-year-old immigrant from one of these villages, says:

Initially, migration began from border villages, meaning that if 100 people left in border villages, 20 people left in non-border areas.

One consequence of the abundance of rural-migratory centers is the rapid spread of migratory behavior to other areas of Sardasht. The concept of spreading migratory behavior from border villages is one whose name clearly conveys its meaning, but its importance is not as simple as that meaning suggests. The importance of this category doubles when it is remembered that the common border between Sardasht County and Iraq is more than 100 kilometers long, and the county's critical and influential villages are located at the border zero points.

Overall, considering the two main categories – deterrence/motivation of geography and space – and the explanations provided, the issue of the effect of geography and space on illegal migration from Sardasht County is clearly understandable in the words of 38-year-old Shawan, whose two brothers have illegally migrated to Europe and who is also looking for an opportunity to migrate;
I love my country as much as my mother, but when there is no other choice, I am forced to leave both my mother and my country.

Table 2. Codes and main categories derived from interviews

Coding of Initial levels	Major category	Main category
Patriotism, our homeland, a place to live	Deterrent effect	Geographical driving forces
Being in a dead end, the illegal immigration triangle, the rural-border immigration hub, accelerating the spread of immigration behavior	Being provocative	
Plunder of national capital, employment, inflation, exchange rate, local economy, sense of distributive justice	macroeconomics	Economic driving forces
Black sheep, low-yield agriculture, frontier economy, social blockage,	Local economy	
Neighborly kinship, cooperation, tolerance, patriarchy, transition, being a man, reproduction of the flow of wealth, compensation for remittances	provocative effect	Cultural driving forces
The family as a system, the crutch of old age	Deterrent effect	
Historical experience, history of smuggling	Being a facilitator and an emboldener	Historical driving forces
Border closures, the killing of Kolbars, the possibility of war	Foreign policies	Governmental driving forces
Procedural justice, insiders and outsiders, quotas, double standards, interactional justice, distrust and public dissatisfaction	The relationship between people and the government	

Note: In the "Main category" column, "Survival Strategy" spans across the rows corresponding to Geographical, Economic, Cultural, Historical, and Governmental driving forces.

ECONOMIC DRIVING FORCES

The category of economic impact refers to those financial issues, problems, and drivers that influence individuals' desire, decision, and actions to migrate. This category was among the most controversial among respondents. In this study, the majority of respondents cited economic issues as the most important motivating factor for migration. For example, 58-year-old Peshwa says, "The source of all problems is the economy. In Iran, the household economy is nothing, and the national economy is also devastated." Arman, 33, also points out that "80 percent of those who migrate have economic reasons as their main reason for migrating." While people like Younes, 29, had a different opinion, pointing out that the majority of illegal immigrants are

teenagers, they saw the main reasons motivating migration differently by distinguishing between the sexual and age characteristics of the immigrants.

For those who immigrated years earlier and for middle-aged people, economic issues were and remain major, but discussing economic issues as the main reason for immigration is uncommon. What do you think a 15-16-year-old boy knows about economics?

To clarify this category, related subcategories will be explained, including macroeconomics, sense of distributive justice, local economics, and social blockage.

Macroeconomic issues affect all Iranians. The people of Sardasht, like other Iranians, are affected by macroeconomic topics. Topics such as the plundering of national economic capital, employment, inflation, and exchange rates were among the factors respondents mentioned as driving Iranians to migrate. Here, the people of Sardasht do not consider themselves to be a separate entity. Abdullah, 75, says about this:

These [officials] are squandering all the country's economic capital. Look, every day we see in the news that they are selling off a corner of the country, auctioning it off, embezzling land. I, who am an older man, see this, and you, who are young, definitely see this more than I do and are bothered more than I am. That's when you get frustrated and pressured, and eventually you get so mentally disturbed that you can't bear it and have no choice but to get rid of yourself and leave.

But the importance and severity of the impact of macro-economic crises can be seen in the answer of 29-year-old Younis, who is closing down his mobile phone shop and is emigrating in three days, to the question, "What if something happens that will make you give up?":

If the dollar stabilizes, even if it reaches 100,000 tomans, I'm not willing to move from here.

The consequences of prolonged economic problems are reflected at the macro level in terms of distributive justice. Distributive justice refers to the fairness of the work a person does in relation to the reward they receive. The majority of respondents were dissatisfied with the rewards and wages they received for their actions. Farmers complained about the price of their produce, workers about unemployment, shopkeepers about the lack of markets, taxi drivers about the high cost of car parts, and employees about low salaries. Ibrahim, 28, who works as a car repairman in a rented shop, summarizes the common denominator of all these professions in one verb: "He doesn't spend."

On the other hand, the concept of local economy refers to economic issues specific to Sardasht County. In this concept, Sardasht is presented as a "separately woven taffeta. Agriculture and income from the border have been the two primary sources of livelihood for the people of this land from the past to the present, the first due to the unevenness and low productivity of agricultural lands, and the second due to the closure of the border by the government, which has seriously affected the livelihood of the people of Sardasht. But the main and hidden point of the story should be heard from the mouth of 36-year-old Zhivar, who believes that comparing the economic prosperity when the borders were open with the stagnation of the local economy after the borders were closed was the main reason for the start of migration, he says:

I see the ideal economic situation that existed before as the source of this situation. When your income suddenly decreases drastically, and you enter a

miserable economic crisis as a result, you are forced to turn to immigration as an income alternative.

The result of the concepts presented in this section is the concept of social blockage. The general belief is that progress and development cannot be achieved in this society because of the obstacles that prevent individuals from accessing resources and opportunities. Local activists believe their possessions differ significantly from their desires. Mehri, 16, whose father sold his car to pay for her move to Evin, says:

My sister Evin wanted to go for a few years, but her family initially opposed it. As we saw the economic situation getting worse day by day, they eventually agreed to let her go because my parents realized that Evin could not make any progress here and was sitting there. Now her family says the right thing to do is for her to go. Look, my sister has been working for two or three years now, but she has not made any progress. All she earns is enough to buy a pair of clothes, but if she had spent these few years outside Iran, she would have had everything now.

As stated, economic factors and discussions are considered essential in understanding the migration behavior of Sardasht residents. Of course, some people may not migrate for money, as Nian said, but for the majority of Sardasht residents, it was as 75-year-old Abdullah said: "It is tough for a family without immigrants to survive in Sardasht."

CULTURAL DRIVING FORCES

Values and norms are shaped by tradition and have been inherited from the past. In other words, an individual's behavior and thoughts are influenced by the cultural teachings passed down to them by past generations. If traditional culture is contrasted with modern culture in terms of freedom of thought and behavior from past cultural teachings, then today the individual from Sardasht stands in the middle. He carries with him both signs of past customs and traditions and has accepted new elements of modern culture. A brief look at the initial concepts that make up this category will clarify the issue.

The relationship between illegal immigration and neighborly kinship is clearly visible in immigration decisions. The intersection of this link can be found in the subcategories of cooperation/village cooperation. Cooperation, or village cooperation, is a social phenomenon that has existed in Kurdistan since ancient times; men participate in agricultural and livestock work and in the construction of rural houses, while women bake bread, weave, wash carpets, and care for and breastfeed children. But today, both men and women, young and old, are involved in illegal immigration. In Sardasht County, neighbors help the immigrant family cover the cost of travel. Ali, 71, from one of the villages in Sardasht, says:

Here, if someone wants to go, everyone helps them. I myself witnessed women selling their gold to pay for the immigration expenses of their neighbor's sons and their families. My neighbor's daughter wanted to go to England. Her father told me, "Uncle Ali, I have a little money." I also had fifty million in my account. As God is my witness, I gave her everything. Now her daughter has arrived in England. They haven't given me my money yet, but fifty million is nothing for someone who is going abroad. As soon as she finds a job, she will send it to me.

The main root of these collaborations must be sought in ensuring the return of money and in making the immigrant indebted. He says:

Today I sell my gold to the neighbor's son; tomorrow they will sell theirs to my daughter. We all have to help our children reach Europe safely. On the other hand, when my neighbor's son is in England, and my child wants to go tomorrow, it will definitely be a source of strength for my son. [He sighs and continues] After all, my children will go one day.

Patriarchy is another sub-concept that is generally familiar to all of us, but its connection with illegal immigration is interesting and noteworthy in its own way. In Sardasht, the existence of this system, in addition to the benefits it has brought to men, also brings responsibilities for them. Therefore, according to the structural-cultural duty of men, predominantly men from the middle and lower classes of society must consider the family's livelihood. They are like someonewho has two children and is a construction worker says: "I have to go and think about the future of my wife and children." If I am soft today, I will be indebted to my family for the rest of my life.

In the semi-traditional, modern society of Sardasht, teenagers have no choice but to prove their ability to perform masculine duties to be accepted by society as men. In the past, by performing adult tasks such as harvesting, working in vineyards, carrying kolbari (a type of kolbari), and smuggling, a person was treated like an adult; from then on, his words had a buyer, he had a more prominent presence in ceremonies, and it was time for him to roll up his sleeves. Being a man is reproduced differently in migration today. Today, one way for a teenager in Sardasht to transition to adulthood is to migrate. He must migrate to be heard, seen, mature, and grow up; Ameneh, 65, says:

When my son was here, I was always worried about him, that nothing bad would happen to him. Now that he works there, he's become a man in his own right, and he helps people. He helps his siblings. He helps the people in the village. All the girls here are my brides because of God, because my son is such a good person. Thank God, I feel at ease that he's on his way.

And if he resists emigrating, he must prepare himself to hear the sarcasm of people like Younis who say: "He who has the means emigrates, he who wants to emigrate is a man, and he who has the means and stays is a man without the means."

The reproduction of the flow of wealth was among other concepts rooted in the tradition of the Sardasht homeland, which influenced the unconventional migration in Sardasht. The flow of wealth in Sardasht has always been from children to parents. Children cooperated in various agricultural and livestock activities, and, under the patriarchal system, wealth also flowed to the family's father. This historical element is reflected in today's discussions about remittance sending. Young people who migrate abroad, following this trend, still remit some of their income to their parents. Ali says:

Our neighbors lived in the village until their old age and had nothing. Their son sent them money, and they bought a house in the city, and now they are our neighbors. This year, they sent him money again, and he bought an SUV.

What is noteworthy is that, due to its volume, the flood of remittances often deviates from its original route and flows to other sectors of society. Kattan, 28, whose parents are both retired and whose two brothers live abroad, says:

If migrants do not send money, the work of many sectors of society will be hampered. To date, migrants have borne the costs of many development projects.

The above concepts refer to cultural elements that have existed in Sardasht society since ancient times and that, to some extent, influence the migration flow from

Sardasht. However, the two concepts of the older man's staff and the family as a system are among those concepts that have a deterrent effect.

Family as a system was another concept that was tied to the issue of illegal immigration. Given the livelihoods of the people of Sardasht – agriculture and animal husbandry, and rural life in those areas, there was a need for the cooperation of all family members. In the livelihood system of the people in that region, children worked alongside their parents in agricultural and animal husbandry. The income from family work was shared by all family members. This type of cooperation was also seen during the boom of the border. For example, the family's sons involved in smuggling would help prepare horses and mules for them. The profits from smuggling also went to all family members. If a house was built or a car was purchased, all family members used it. Here, the family is defined as a system in which each member takes on specific tasks to survive. The family's survival is made possible by the active participation of all members and by the division of labor among them. In other words, if the family helps some of its members migrate, it makes migration a dream for the rest.

In short, what happened is best described by Bapir: My uncle left because he had to go, and I stayed because I had to stay. He was condemned to go, and I was condemned to stay.

HISTORICAL DRIVING FORCES

The subcategory of historical work refers to any work with roots in Sardasht County's history. The main content of this category is the proposition "history constantly repeating itself". People will have the opportunity to reuse their experience in specific situations and in the future, in new ones. Although the concepts related to traditional subculture overlapped with the subcategory of historical work and could have been brought under one heading, the researcher concluded that the category of historical work has not been structured, and its possibility of use is viewed merely as a repetition of a successful experience and a solution to overcome temporary conditions.

Respondents pointed out smuggling as one of the successful historical experiences. For the reasons mentioned in the previous sections - proximity to the border, spatial similarity, etc. - the livelihood of the people of Sardasht has been dependent on the border. Smuggling and trade with Iraqi Kurdistan, especially when border controls were less strict than they are today, had boosted the local economy. The people of Sardasht have learned that no border can stop their will, and in other words, the taboo of the border has become meaningless for the people of that land for many years.

Rahim, 37, says:

Everyone in the city is familiar with the twists and turns of the border. Many of us have once eaten the bread of the border, and many families have seen the heat of the border, yet people have learned to live on the border.

Consequently, although the border appears to be a deterrent at first glance, living on the border has made it easier for the activist from Sardasht to cross it, break the taboo on crossing it, and change the approach of people from Sardasht to the border. They have seen both the bright side of the border and experienced its gloomy face. Consequently, when the researcher asked Yousef, who was illegally leaving Turkey for Europe a few days after the interview, if he was not afraid of the dangers ahead, he replied: "If you want to go all the way to Tehran now, are you sure you will arrive safely?"

GOVERNMENTAL DRIVING FORCES

It was these governments that made people sacrifice their lives. Throughout history, we have witnessed many such sacrifices. But today, on the one hand, due to the lack of love from governments like ours, and on the other hand, the value and importance that European countries attach to young people, our young people sacrifice their lives for the soil of European countries (Mamosta, 43 years old).

The government's impact on illegal immigration from Sardasht County should be examined from two different perspectives. To this end, the first section examines subcategories related to the government's international policies, followed by those related to the government's level of acceptance among the people of Sardasht County.

Regarding the government's impact on the process of illegal migration from Sardasht, no concept has been emphasized in the interviews as much as the border closure's impact on youth migration. In addition to the effect it has had on the expansion of the wave of migration from Sardasht, the closure of the border, due to the strictness that is being implemented at the border, has led to the killing of kolbars every day. As a result, more and more mothers in that region are suffering. Hatav, whose 17-year-old son was killed in a kolbar, says with tears:

My eldest son was 17 years old when the government killed him in a kolbari. I sent my second son to leave Iran, lent him money, sold my gold, and told him to go. I didn't want them to bring me the news of my youngest son's death one day.

In addition to the above, which indicates the start of the migration wave after the Islamic Republic of Iran implemented strict international border controls, the concept of fear of the future refers to people's concern about the possibility of war. Respondents expressed their fear of the consequences of a potential war, considering the Iranian government's relations with other countries, sanctions, and international events. Yousef, 29, says in this regard:

Imagine if there were a war tomorrow, I swear to God, if there were a war, our situation would be much worse than Syria. At the very least, we should expect 10 years of war. So, how many years do we need to rebuild after 10 years of war? Ten years of war and then ten years of development, that's 20 years. What will happen to my child in the middle of this? My child's life will be destroyed in the war and after the war. That's when my daughter will say: Dad, I will never forgive you, you were not a man, you had no offer, while your friends left here and built a life for their children, you stayed and destroyed my life too.

In addition to the issues above related to the Iranian government's international policies, the categories of social justice and people's trust in the government relate to the relationship between the people and the government, which, incidentally, have had a much greater impact on immigration decisions. According to the majority of respondents, justice is not considered one of the essential pillars of social cohesion or of the bond between people and the government. Although individuals and groups – elites, politicians, or critics – may hold different opinions and approaches to the distribution of social justice, what is essential is examining justice from the perspective of a society's citizens. Whenever activist from Sardasht talks about the relationship between people and the government, he immediately compares it with a similar situation in European countries.

The initial concept of the sense of injustice includes three types: distributive, procedural, and interactional. In this section, the first two concepts describe two feelings of justice people may have towards the procedure and the interaction with

the political system, and the idea of distributive justice will also be explained in the sub-category of economic effects.

The concept of procedural justice refers to the feeling that the law is fair. Impartiality, the right to express an opinion, the right to participate in decision-making, and the right to be heard are among the principles of procedural justice. When people compare themselves to others and feel they are not treated equally under the law, they may feel mistreated. From the respondents' perspective, people are not equal before the law. The concepts of insiders and outsiders and the granting of quotas and privileges to certain people, the double pressure in Kurdish areas, indicate the existence of this type of injustice from the perspective of the respondents, which ultimately leads to a sense of alienation from the political system. Kaveh, 36, who now lives in England, says:

Let me reassure you, we are one behind as Kurds. Just visit non-Kurdish cities, and you will feel the difference. Let me tell you this: I often felt like a second-class citizen in Iran.

But the feeling of interactional justice refers to being treated with respect and courtesy. Respondents believe that the government's treatment in sensitive situations is outside of courtesy. They see the government's incivility doubly by referring to the difference in religion and language. A 43-year-old teacher says:

Our youth shout that they have no job, no career. I studied a lot, but no one cares about me. My life is ruined. The government throws him in jail, files a case against him, says, "Did you shout? Are you making the enemy happy?" And a thousand and one stigmas are attached to him.

The consequences of the above categories are manifested in distrust and dissatisfaction with and from the political system. On this basis, the vast majority of respondents are not satisfied with the government's performance, and their lived experiences indicate that the political institution has increased their dissatisfaction by interfering in the most minor issues of individuals. Here, immigration takes on a protest meaning, a protest against the government's intrusion into individuals' privacy. They speak of political suffocation, define the political space as closed, and use a negative interrogative to emphasize this part of their answer:

Kaveh: How can I live in a country that interferes in the most minor issues of my life? Mohammad: How can I live in a country that always puts me in the middle? Kajal: What if there is a war? Haval 31 says, "Wasn't it the government that closed the border?" Rozgar: Wasn't it the government that killed the Kolbars? Hey, how much has the government spent so far to improve our living conditions?

By integrating and refining the data, the research's main category was identified. This concept encompasses all the major categories. The core category of "survival strategy" represents the current situation in the phenomenon of illegal migration from Sardasht County to Europe. The concept of survival strategy refers to the situation in which an individual makes desired / undesired decisions in response to environmental, social, and cultural pressures (the five categories mentioned in the findings section). In other words, this concept represents the individual's rational response to structural conditions. The Kurdish activist from Sardasht is forced to adopt a specific strategy when faced with gigantic, powerful structures. In this confrontation, the activist is unable to accept the current situation. He understands the structural pressure and seeks a solution so that he can breathe in this poisonous air. The activist from Sardasht is faced with a severe contradiction and is suddenly torn

apart and finally decides to make a big decision to survive and stand up for his family against the pressure of structures as inflexible as tradition, as tall as history, as daunting as border geography, and as abhorrent as political-economic injustice.

The macro-structures examined in this study have each influenced an individual's migration decisions in some way. Although love for one's homeland can be a deterrent to migration, it has led the individual from Sardasht to believe that "my homeland, although a fragment of my body, is no longer a suitable place to live." Therefore, "I must go and leave my homeland alone." Since family holds great meaning in the context of Sardasht and still carries the flavor and aroma of the old days for Sardasht activists, each of the heroes of our study contributes in some way to keeping this beautiful creature afloat. Some are old and stay against their will, and others follow the unconventional seven-adventure migration route to breathe new life into the half-dead body of this God-given blessing. He has to leave because his family is out of breath.

These events have occurred while the activist from Sardasht has been waiting for years in the hope of being seen, guarding the border, coming to the ballot box, and finally has no memory except for political-economic injustice. When he opens his mouth to speak, he says in despair, "If things were supposed to be fixed, they would have been fixed by now, so he has to leave; we can't please them." Finally, he implements his immigration decisions to deal with his undesirable situation. They go in search of drugs, and if they stay, they may live their lives in great fear like Joseph and ruminate: "Tomorrow, when my daughter asks, 'Dad, why did you stay and make me miserable?' What answer will I have?"

In general, the survival strategy is very similar to what Mehdi, 27, a senior philosophy graduated from the University of Tehran and a supermarket worker, says:

Until last year, I myself used to say that emigration is a great sin. It is unforgivable to leave your own country. I thought you had lived in this land, so you should develop it. I used to tell my friend, if we don't want to create it, then who will? But slowly my opinion changed. I now give immigrants the right, because nothing is going to be fixed, and the wise thing to do is to emigrate before it is too late to save your future and that of your family, even if it is challenging and painful.

Now, since migration is a multidimensional phenomenon, it can be explained from any theoretical perspective; in other words, aspects of any theory can be observed in the phenomenon of Sardasht migration. In this study, we can also clearly see traces of theoretical explanations of repulsive attraction, microeconomics, network theory, and cumulative causality, among others. But what can explain the migration of the residents of the Kurdish region of Sardasht, Kurdistan, Iran, more than any other theory, is, on the one hand, the repulsive dimension of the repulsive-attraction theory (especially in the first phase of migration in this region) and then both the repulsive and attractive dimensions of that theory (especially in the second phase of migration in the last decade).

This has caused migration in this region to become a strategy or strategy for survival, mainly due to the existing repulsive conditions; sometimes it happened simply for survival, regardless of the attractions of the destination, and sometimes it is done by taking into account the repulsions of the origin and the attractions and opportunities of the destination, for survival for oneself, the generation of children, and of course, creating better survival conditions for the survivors in the origin. But in the theoretical explanation of this phenomenon in this part of Iranian Kurdistan,

one cannot ignore the theories of international and, of course, local networks that influence and facilitate migration. This theory explains well the existential position of these networks in the continuation of migration. Finally, despite the expansion and prevalence of migration among the people from Sardasht, one cannot ignore the issue of migration culture. In other words, one can assume that migration in this region has now become a culture that has found its own behavioral, value, normative, and semantic patterns, and proving this assumption requires deeper research.

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