SPECIAL EDITION ON AFGHANISTAN

MIGRATION POLICY PRACTICE

A Journal for and by Policymakers Worldwide

A neighbourhood beauty parlour in Shahrake Mahdia, Kabul, Afghanistan. Shahrake Mahdia has developed over the past two decades as a place of settlement for IDPs, people migrating from rural areas to Kabul, and returning migrants from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. © Samuel Hall 2021/Nassim MAJIDI

SPECIAL EDITION ON AFGHANISTAN

CONTENTS

Introduction

Solon Ardittis and Frank Laczko[1]

This special edition of *Migration Policy Practice* (MPP), guest edited by Nassim Majidi with editorial support from Laura Chapman, focuses on the migration situation in Afghanistan post-Taliban takeover. It includes contributions from both policymakers and academics and explores the national, regional and global ramifications of ongoing developments, particularly as regards issues of protection, Afghan women, education, legal identity, remittances, resettlement and return migration.

This is the last issue of *MPP* produced under the joint editorship of Solon Ardittis and Frank Laczko, the journal's founders. *MPP* was established by Eurasylum and IOM in 2011 on the premise that, while an increasing number of migration journals, on paper and online, were being launched internationally, the majority if not all of them were only targeted at the academic community and/or at specialized practitioners (such as in the health sector and social services). Policymakers in the field of migration, whether in government, European Union and international institutions, or in civil society, only rarely contributed articles to existing journals. Not only that, they also rarely benefited, as readers, from articles published in scholarly and professional journals. This can be explained by a range of factors pertaining to the relative lack of topicality of articles, due in particular to the following: (a) lengthy peer review and publication process; (b) their lack of policy insights, relevance and applicability; and (c) the overly academic/specialized approach, style and language adopted by most journals.

On the other hand, and certainly not to a lesser extent than academics and specialized practitioners, policymakers are able to contribute to and complement significantly the existing body of knowledge and sources of information on international migration. Their knowledge and experience can often embrace a range of issues, dimensions and perspectives that are rarely covered by existing journals, such as the following: (a) findings and lessons learned from major evaluations of national/cross-national policies and programmes; (b) new approaches and best practices in specific migration interventions; (c) details of major operations carried out to prevent/combat illegal border crossings and trafficking in human beings;

(d) experience of securing and managing donor-supported programmes; and (e) contributions to ongoing high-profile policy debates. Existing journals in the field of migration therefore only rarely provided a vehicle for policymakers to reflect and write on their day-to-day policy practice, their decisions and their experience, and to share such insights with like-minded colleagues nationally and internationally.

Since the journal was established 11 years ago, 46 issues of *MPP* were produced, covering all the major global migration policy developments as they unfolded, with contributions from over 300 authors. These have included a wide range of senior public officials including the Director General of IOM, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the European Union Commissioner for Home Affairs, the President of the European Parliament, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Migration, the Chair of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, the Coordinator of the Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees, the European Union Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, the Global Coordinator of civil society activities in the United Nations High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, the Director of the Human Development Report Office (United Nations Development Programme), the Chair of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Migration, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State at the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the United States Department of State, the Director of the US-VISIT programme at the United States' Department of Homeland Security and many others.

The founding editors of *MPP* would like to thank all the journal's past authors for their valuable contributions and for lending *MPP* the credibility and recognition it has acquired today. They would also like to thank all current and past members of the journal's Editorial Committee for their continued support. Last but not least, the editors would like to thank warmly Valerie Hagger, the journal's Editorial Coordinator, as well as all current and past members of her language editing and graphic design teams (Laarni Alfaro, Melissa Borlaza, Mylene Buensuceso, Mae Angeline Delgado and Anna Lyn Constantino) for

[1] Solon Ardittis is Managing Director of Eurasylum Ltd. and Frank Laczko is Director of the Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC) at IOM in Berlin. They are the co-editors of *MPP*.

their untiring efforts to produce a quality journal for more than a decade. *MPP* will now continue to operate under a new editorship managed solely by IOM, after Eurasylum decided to renounce any future involvement in the journal. ◼

Introduction to MPP Special Issue on Afghanistan

Nassim Majidi[1]

The world is watching a full-fledged attack on human rights in Afghanistan – from mobility rights to women's rights. The response has largely been to "wait and see", which the Afghan population is feeling. The chaos of the last two weeks of August 2021, when the world's attention was focused on evacuations at Kabul International Airport, the last point of exit, has turned nine months later into silence. But it does not have to be that way; Afghans can be supported in a multitude of ways to access their rights and to access protection. This special issue offers nine articles that explore a range of safe protection pathways and remind us all of the actions within reach to protect Afghans, at home and abroad.

While global attention is no longer focused on Afghanistan, and many governments now have their eyes on Ukraine, Afghans remain waiting: waiting for protection, waiting for solutions, and waiting for clarity. At the time of writing, Afghan teenage girls have been banned from attending secondary school for the past 237 days; women's access to health care has been impeded and many have had access to employment blocked. Most recently, the Ministry for Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice has announced that women "should not leave their homes unless necessary and should do so only with their whole bodies including their faces covered" as explained by Heather Barr, associate women's rights director at Human Rights Watch (Barr, 2022; Reuters, 2022). Prior to August 2021, Afghanistan's economy was 75 per cent dependent on foreign assistance; since then, donor governments have largely frozen such assistance, such as the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund that had previously paid the salaries of millions of health workers and teachers, and the Afghan Central Bank's credentials have been revoked, effectively blocking it from accessing foreign currency reserves (Human Rights Watch, 2022). As a result, the country is experiencing a deepening humanitarian crisis: the United Nations Development Programme has estimated that up to 97 per cent would be living below the poverty line by mid-2022 (United Nations Development Programme, 2021).

Prior to the United States' withdrawal, many Afghans had left the country due to ongoing armed conflict. Today, people are leaving because of persecution, insecurity – in its multiple shapes and forms, and uncertainty: for the futures of their wives, sisters, daughters, and grandmothers — and because of an economic system on the brink of collapse. Within this context, what solutions can be provided? This Special Issue on Afghanistan explores the various protection pathways that governments, universities, cities and the diaspora can rally behind. It serves as a reminder that while Afghans must be protected at home and abroad, and must not be forgotten, the international community's promises of operationalizing humanitarian corridors, funding and designing legal pathways to protection must be delivered.

The time for action is now

Afghan women and girls are some of the worst affected by the Taliban takeover, including women left behind. Samuel Hall – a social enterprise based in Kabul – has documented the lives of women whose husbands have left, women who remain with limited protection in the country and who shared their fears of crossing international borders alone, and the overall lack of safe spaces for them. These women live in communities who had previously depended heavily on migration and development, with border closures since August 2021 affecting them and questioning their survival. In "Afghan women, migration, and their future", we draw on research conducted in Shahrake Mahdia, a township located north of Kabul, to document the experiences of women living there and explore how migration has always been a lifeline, and a source of development for the inhabitants of the township. Maintaining this lifeline is essential to avoid what we see in this article: the rise and fall of communities that had seen much social and economic progress.

Moving beyond the current challenges faced by Afghan women, **education is at risk with mechanisms to avoid a larger disaster within reach**. In "Education in Afghanistan in a time of crisis and displacement", Christopher Nyamandi (Afghanistan Country Director of Save the Children International) illustrates the current challenges facing both teachers and children learning within Afghanistan, and the lack of any clear educational policy framework from the Taliban. He explores existing donor mechanisms that can be used

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[1] Edited by Nassim Majidi, PhD, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Samuel Hall, a research organization specializing on migration and displacement with offices in Kabul since 2010, as well as Nairobi, Tunis and Berlin. She is the guest editor of this special issue, with editorial support from Laura Chapman, Research and Communications Officer, Samuel Hall.

to maintain education activities within Afghanistan, which can adapt to the needs of displaced children living within camps, and can help further prevent children from dropping out of school – and emphasizes that these mechanisms can and must be expanded.

Higher education solutions are available too, as the next group of authors argue that higher education can act as a protection pathway for a number of Afghans. In Europe, pathways have ranged from student visas and scholarships with integration support, to resettlement-based refugee sponsorship schemes (Share Network, 2022). There is a continued need to expand such pathways through efficient, multi-stakeholder approaches, as highlighted by the University of Bologna and partners in their recent manifesto. In "Higher education as a complementary pathway to protection for Afghan students: Historical and current experiences, and thoughts for the future", Ceri Oeppen and Tahir Zaman (Co-Directors of the Sussex Centre for Migration Research) explore how third-country education as a complementary pathway to protection has expanded under the Global Compact for Refugees, and the possibilities of using higher education as such a pathway for Afghan students. Drawing on their own experience of the Chevening Scholarship programme, they highlight some of the challenges of using training programmes as a pathway for protection.

Resettlement remains the unspoken solution. With evacuations no longer taking place, and border closures in place, resettlement still remains another crucial pathway to protection for Afghans that remain in the country. In "Resettlement: Routes to safety for Afghans left behind", Abdul Ghafoor Raifey (Director of Afghanistan Migrants Advice and Support Organization) looks at the role there is for both neighbouring countries – such as the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan – and more broadly for Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Europe. Drawing on his own experience, he emphasizes the need for a clear policy agenda on resettlement and the rapid operationalization of resettlement routes, to avoid the situations of limbo people have endured in camps and in third-country resettlement schemes.

Legal identity is at the heart of the mobility challenges – and solutions – facing Afghans. When the United States withdrew, the majority of Afghans did not have passports, nor other forms of civil documentation, while many passport offices have been and remain closed, preventing renewals. In their piece "Legal identity in Afghanistan", Katherine James (Research Lead at Samuel Hall) and Margo Baars (Senior Programme Coordinator at IOM Afghanistan)

highlight how now, more than ever, there is a need for Afghan women, men and children to access legal identity to ensure they are able to access their right to freedom of movement, and many other rights.

Remittances are a lifeline to further support. The economic fallout of the Taliban takeover makes remittances from family members in the diaspora more important than ever. In "Lifelines: Remittances in Afghanistan", Nicholas Ross and Stefanie Barratt (respectively Research Manager and the Data Standards and Analytics Pillar Lead at Samuel Hall) highlight the need for more research into the role of remittances in Afghanistan, which form a vast yet fragile financial ecosystem helping to sustain Afghan communities. They call for remittances to be included within migrant and humanitarian policies and programmes, and for policymakers to work to ensure that Afghan families are able to access remittances safely and securely.

The Afghan diaspora knows it will need to rise to the challenge, and needs to be supported to do so. In "A diaspora in flux: Changing dynamics of Afghans abroad and the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan", Martin Wolf Anderson (Project Coordinator for the Diaspora Programme at the Danish Refugee Council) explores what the Taliban takeover will mean for the close to 6 million Afghans living in the diaspora, who have been long been active in engaging not only economically, but also socially and politically with their home country. Looking forward, Anderson highlights the need for the international aid community, donors and researchers to continue constructive engagement with the diaspora.

Returns do not lead to reintegration nor to safe migration pathways. The experience of Afghans who had returned to their country after previously migrating abroad, and the many barriers they face to reintegration is the focus of the next article. The authors call for a rethink of the very term "sustainable reintegration" within the Afghan context, and to work towards other legal pathways. In "Return to Afghanistan: The perils of return to unstable and insecure countries", Constanza Vera-Larrucea (Research Coordinator at the Migration Studies Delegation Delmi, Department of Justice for the Government of Sweden) and Henrik Malm Lindberg (Associate Professor and Acting Head of Secretariat at Delmi, Department of Justice for the Government of Sweden) highlight that returnees' situation is often worse upon their return than before they left, demonstrating that return is not the final step in the migration cycle.

The last article asks: Where does this all leave us? What are concrete ways to think about solutions? In "The time is now: Moving towards a coherent multilevel approach to protect Afghans", Johanna C. Günther (Research Fellow for the Migration Policy Research Group at the University of Hildesheim); Raphaela Schweiger (Programme Director Migration at Robert Bosch Stiftung and PhD candidate at the Research Hub for Migration, Displacement and Integration Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg); and Janina Stürner-Siovitz (Research Fellow for the Centre for Human Rights Erlangen-Nuremberg, Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg) look at concrete solutions that should be urgently prioritized. Ranging from the role of digital IDs, the private sector and cities, to reminding us again of the need for resettlement routes and integration at destination, their contribution highlights the urgent need for coherent, human-rights-centred policies and responses for the treatment of Afghans. ■

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Afghan women are taking on an unbearable burden and levels of uncertainty affecting their lives and those of their children. Those who are heading their own households or waiting for their husband's remittances are either unable to work or unable to access remittances which are a lifeline for them. Women and children already make up 80 per cent of internally displaced persons (IDPs), one of the most vulnerable subgroups of the Afghan population. Amplifying the voices of the millions of women and children left behind, who were already marginalized before the Taliban's 2021 offensive, has become even more crucial.

In the spring of 2021, Samuel Hall conducted a qualitative assessment to document the impacts of spousal migration on Afghan wives. At the core of this study were in-depth conversations with 100 wives of migrants across nine areas of Kabul province, supplemented by family tracing interviews with migrant husbands abroad and wives in Afghanistan, focus group discussions, and interviews with key informants. The report is forthcoming with added insights on the current context.

Afghan women, migration and their future

Nassim Majidi, Najia Alizada, Katherine James and Marta Bivand Erdal[1]

In June 2021, a team of researchers travelled to Shahrake Mahdia, a township located north of Kabul, in the area of Dashte Barchi, which at the time of the research counted 50,000 to 60,000 residents. It was chosen as a research area for the study of migration and development as an illustration of an area that had developed from scratch over two decades (between 2001 and 2021), with both infrastructural and service-related improvements.[2] The area developed with the arrival of Afghan refugees who returned from Pakistan or the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the central provinces of the country. As migration was foundational to this area's development and to its people, the key question remains: How can migration continue to support the inhabitants of this township and what connections can they depend on? This article centres on the responses given by women during fieldwork in June 2021, and supplemented with insights gained over the phone in September 2021, after the Taliban takeover.

An area self-made by displaced communities

Shahrake Mahdia sprung as an urban neighbourhood, built from scratch by returning migrants settling there from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, IDPs and rural–urban migrants seeking to move to an affordable area of Kabul. Their movements were driven by social and ethnic ties, as well as community links. Construction and infrastructure developed, with homes, schools, private clinics, shops and roads emerging over time. Private sector actors established factories in the area. Since the land was initially deserted, the area was quiet, and the costs were much lower than in other areas of Kabul. Once the road infrastructure developed, local shops were set up through incoming remittances, building on migrant networks extending across locations and countries, with support coming from the countries neighbouring Afghanistan as well as from Europe and Australia.

During data collection in June 2021, the pressures of conflict were visible: electricity outages had become more frequent, and associated water outages too. Shahrake Mahdia experienced what was perceived as a drastic change over the period of 2020–2021: according to the police, the number of thefts in the area had increased, also affecting the sense of security for women who wanted to move around, not least after dark. The neighbourhood changed further under the impact of COVID-19, especially as inflation impacted the area economically, and increased poverty, but also through growing insecurity. In the months prior to data collection, the local population reported experiencing the growing presence of the Taliban on the outskirts of Kabul, and of their neighbourhood, specifically. Repeated attacks on Hazara schools in the Dashte Barchi area, the urban district where Shahrake Mahdia is located, were on the minds of many mothers that were interviewed.

The data collection included key informant interviews with 17 local residents – business owners, non-governmental organization employees, government officers, police, teachers, youth representatives – informal interactions and observations, as well as four focus groups, two with men and two with women aged 18–39 years. A clear sense of despair emerged from these interactions with people in Shahrake Mahdia, six weeks before the Taliban takeover in Kabul. Residents did not have a positive outlook on the future, neither for themselves nor for the area, and showed signs of psychological pressure, knowing that the Taliban were gaining ground and nearing Kabul. The shared feeling was clear: the existing government under President Ghani was no longer protecting nor representing them. Equally clear was a shared sense of nostalgia about the period under the Karzai administration, associated with the area's development when there was a strong sense of purpose and hope.

Whereas education had expanded in Shahrake Mahdia during the past decade, school and university closures hit the area during the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. Although already prevalent before, with the pandemic, young graduates found themselves unemployed or only able to find work in jobs that did not require their education, and others had no choice but to migrate following the end of their studies. One youth representative explained: "Young people are full of despair, with no hope in the future. Most

think of escaping." Women interviewed in Shahrake Mahdia spoke openly about a range of pressures, economic and security issues, which have led to more disputes at home and infighting within families.

Migration from Shahrake Mahdia meant that women in this neighbourhood had been "left behind", seeing their husbands migrate abroad on their own, to make up for lost income during the pandemic. The women encountered during fieldwork had preferred to stay. They still hoped to study, work and build a life in Shahrake Mahdia. They recognized the many improvements in the area over the past decade, such as markets being built, which they as women could access easily. In Shahrake Mahdia, women were more often speaking out against migration than men. Women were in favour of a calm life, remaining in their township, compared to views expressed by the men in the area. This difference was explained by the women as the outcome of difficult displacement experiences, escaping conflict years prior from central provinces such as Daikundi or Wardak to seek safety in Kabul. Women described these displacement experiences very negatively. While migration and mobility were described by men as realities of life, for the women interviewed, migration more often represented a strategy that they would have like to avoid having to pursue for themselves and their families.

Source: United Nations Geospatial (2011). Available at www.un.org/geospatial/content/afghanistan.
Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

Have women's views of migration changed? Where are these women now?

In the aftermath of the Taliban takeover in August 2021, members of the MIGNEX research team conducted follow-up calls with female research participants from Shahrake Mahdia, as well as the two other research areas: Behsud (close to Jalalabad in the south) and Shahrake Jibrael (close to Herat in the west). Many of the women encountered during data collection have remained in the areas they lived in, although some women had also left. Among the women who stayed in Shahrake Mahdia, many felt that leaving the country was simply not possible for them due to their gender.

Those women who were able to leave in early September stated that they had not kept in touch with the community, beyond their immediate family. They also experienced family separation, with many losing contact with family members at the border, in the process of fleeing their country. Those women who remained in Afghanistan reported significant changes in their everyday mobility and daily routines. Many were too scared to leave their homes and had given up all previous activities, including community groups and women's empowerment projects. One woman in Herat reflected on how women's erasure from the economy has far-reaching impacts for communities, as women were the backbone of the local economy in some places (and for some families), but are now for all practical purposes overwhelmingly unable to work.

Women interviewed over the phone in September reported waiting for help from their family members abroad. However, many had family members who had been in Europe for years, but had not been able to obtain legal statuses that would allow for family reunification. Overall, many of the women remaining in Afghanistan appear to have very inadequate information about how Afghans in the diaspora could help their family members and other Afghans in Afghanistan, and how limited Afghans' prospects were – and would remain – abroad. This pertains not least to rules on qualifying for reunification with family members abroad. Some women with male family members who had migrated earlier stated that they were scared of crossing international borders alone. This was confounded for some, who also had female family members with significant health issues, whom they would also be responsible for during such a journey.

Both the decline and what was seen as the fall of communities and that of their country was commented on by women in phone interviews. Since the Taliban took power, many businesses in Shahrake Mahdia and in other areas in Afghanistan ceased to operate. Not only employers, but also employees had been forced to migrate. This included those whose businesses struggled, and could not survive the economic impact of the Taliban government takeover, confounded by the halting of foreign aid and international transfers, following the withdrawal of United States troops. In the immediate aftermath, the private sector had crumbled, while the Taliban had taken control of the public sector, without the ability to pay staff and with severe uncertainty and fear about the future prospects of public sphere activities. Those Afghans with the means necessary to leave the country, namely financial resources and the possession of a passport and/or visa, by and large left during the period of evacuation in late August and into September 2021.

One of the research participants who was interviewed over the phone had managed to escape over the border to Pakistan, after the Taliban government took over the country. This was the first time she had ever left her country in her lifetime. During previous cycles of conflict in Afghanistan, she had left her home, but to find refuge elsewhere within Afghanistan, and more specifically, to find a new home in Shahrake Mahdia. She had never contemplated leaving Afghanistan before.

"What will await us now?"

She posed this question to us once she found herself on the other side of the border: "What will await us now?" She had made it to Pakistan, after 10 days of waiting in busy crowds at the Torkham border crossing point. She was on the safe side, yet had no information about what steps she could take to benefit from the international protection that she presumably has every legal right to. Meanwhile, the Government of Pakistan no longer recognizes incoming Afghans as refugees, and does not have a refugee status determination system in place. Although she and her family were able to leave Afghanistan, her hopes were still unfulfilled. Thus, her eyes were now set on resettlement and evacuation to a third country, given the lack of options available to her, as an Afghan refugee arriving in Pakistan.

The women who have remained in Shahrake Mahdia asked the same question: "What will await us now?" Those whom the authors have spoken with report feeling uncertain and anxious. They recognized that the Taliban's plans remained unclear and temporary. Women were unsure about how the Taliban plans to apply and regulate sharia within the country (speaking in September 2021). They were also unclear about whether they could access passport services, whether women would be allowed to travel abroad, and whether their work would resume. The women interviewed by phone in September kept repeating the word "evacuation". Already in mid-September, however, the rest of the world had appeared to move on. For these women, meanwhile, the scenes from Kabul International Airport remain etched in their minds.

Will Afghan women remain "left behind"?

It should be no surprise, nor exaggeration, to claim that the present Afghan crisis has most negatively impacted women, who in many cases are bearing the brunt of the crisis. In Shahrake Mahdia, women's lives have changed overnight. While women and men could walk freely in the streets, and women's beauty parlours decorated the urban landscape of this neighbourhood in July, now those visible traits of what was normal everyday life are gone. There is a sense of calm and quiet outside, but there is palpable anxiety inside. Once again, women find themselves behind the four walls of their rooms, just as their mothers experienced 25 years ago.

These realities were captured in a photo story by Samuel Hall, in 2021, through research conducted in Kabul province with women who stayed in Afghanistan, while their husbands migrated abroad to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Türkiye or to the Gulf countries. Photographs of the shoes of each woman and their family were taken as a way to create a visual record of their lives, while protecting their identities. Under a Taliban-led government, visualizing the realities of millions of women who stay in Afghanistan, who were already marginalized before the 2021 offensive, has become even more crucial.

As women are now even less mobile, and more restrained in every aspect of life beyond their homes, it is crucial that information about possibilities for family reunification is made available where relevant in accessible ways. Furthermore, there is an obligation to ensure that access to international protection for those who are in need of it is viable – both to allow Afghans to gain protection outside of the region in Europe and beyond, and to enable Afghans to enter bordering countries such as Pakistan. Amnesty International has called for prima facie status for Afghan women and girls in recognition of their suffering and of the human rights abuses targeted at them. Simultaneously, it is paramount that the international community, humanitarian actors and diplomats remain and engage with Afghanistan, not abandoning Afghans, not least women and girls. ■

Education in Afghanistan in a time of crisis and displacement[1]

Christopher Nyamandi[2]

The implications of the current crisis on education: Urgent unmet needs

For children in Afghanistan, especially for those who have been displaced, the current situation has considerably worsened in the last several years, especially when it comes to education.

Prior to the Taliban takeover, 3.7 million Afghan children (42%) were not in school. As a result of the COVID-19–related school closures, in 2020, those children who were enrolled in school missed 44 weeks out of 52. Armed conflict as districts fell to the Taliban throughout 2021 led to further closures and, as a result, parents were fearful of sending their children to school. Save the Children estimates that active conflict has impacted around 30 weeks of the 2021 school year. These extended periods of temporary school closure have led to significant increases in overall dropout rates, especially among Afghan girls. After the first COVID-19 lockdown was lifted and schools reopened, only a quarter of girls enrolled in secondary education returned. Those children who temporarily stop attending school typically do not come back for a variety of reasons, most commonly due to child marriage and child labour. A study by Samuel Hall et al. (2018:21) found that child labour was especially prevalent among displaced populations in Afghanistan; 18 per cent of families interviewed across several provinces in Afghanistan stated that they relied on child labour for income out of necessity in order to survive. Existing research suggests that there are significant correlations between child marriage and girls dropping out of school; according to a 2015 Demographic and Health Survey, child marriage was the third most commonly stated reason for girls dropping out of school, with nearly a fifth of female dropouts citing early marriage as the reason halting their education (UNICEF/Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled, Government of Afghanistan, 2018:27).

The supply chain system for educational materials has further complicated education provision in Afghanistan. Prior to the regime change in August 2021, the former Government of Afghanistan was unable to procure basic books for schools as a result of a mixture of conflict, COVID-19 and corruption. Furthermore, there was consistent inequality between private schools – which operated smoothly and were attended by children of higher socioeconomic status – schools supported by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations agencies and government-run schools, which were not adequately monitored and lacked adequate supplies. Additionally, continued conflict has damaged the physical structure of many school buildings, with some affected by bombing and others falling into disrepair.

When the Taliban entered Kabul and became the de facto leaders of Afghanistan in August 2021, they lacked the funding capacities to support teachers. Save the Children's staff in Afghanistan have spoken to teachers who are unable to purchase fuel in their motorbikes to come to school, and who are unable to purchase food for either themselves or their children, leaving them reliant on donations from within their own communities. Children have described teachers only showing up to schools on days when they know that officials will be present. In response, children have stopped attending school on a daily basis. Additionally, there is now an urgent need for heating and lighting in classrooms, particularly as winter approaches. Media have reported that since their takeover, the Taliban have not been paying Central Asian electricity suppliers, nor have they resumed collecting money from consumers, leaving the entire country at risk of a blackout, which would have further repercussions on education (Trofimov and Shah, 2021). It remains highly likely that COVID-19 will continue to disrupt education via future waves of the virus and new variants; currently, just 2.2 per cent of the population is fully vaccinated (Reuters, n.d.).

Informal and formal education: Plans moving forward

Since the government change in August 2021, Save the Children has reported significant interest from donors in protecting the progress made on education in Afghanistan over the past 20 years. There are existing funding mechanisms that could be used by donors in order to maintain activities in the country. For example, the multi-donor pooled funding mechanisms Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership

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[1] The following contribution is an edited transcript from a conversation with Christopher Nyamandi (Save the Children, n.d.).

[2] Christopher Nyamandi is Afghanistan Country Director of Save the Children International.

for Education would allow NGOs working within Afghanistan to scale up educational activities (Education Cannot Wait, n.d.). There is a need for timely, flexible funding that allows organizations to adjust quickly to the rapidly evolving context, quickly deploying resources to the urgent unmet needs that arise.

Certain methodologies such as accelerated learning will be essential to ensure displaced children and other students – who have spent significant periods of time unable to attend school – can take remedial classes as appropriate, in order to facilitate entry into public school systems. Community-based education (CBE) will also be essential, as the scarcity of public schools mean that children have to travel long distances to reach school. Through CBE, children can access education close to their homes, and to be taught by local teachers that the communities know and trust. This strategy has been found to work particularly well for early childhood learning and grades 1–4. CBE systems are safe and attractive to local communities, as well as incredibly resilient. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Government placed the country under lockdown, forcing many formal schools to shut, community education was able to continue, as NGOs were able to provide appropriate COVID-19 prevention measures for teachers and children.

For those children who have experienced displacement, NGOs such as Save the Children have been working to support the transition between emergency education programming and inclusion within the public education system. Often, displaced children living in camps will begin learning in temporary learning spaces such as tents. After a certain period of time – usually around six months – their families begin to locally integrate, which is the appropriate time to direct children towards local schools. However, often, local schools lack the capacity to take on additional students. In order to fill this gap, schools that initially started as first responses during conflict situations have ended up running for several years because the former Government of Afghanistan did not have sufficient resources to absorb these students into local government-run schools. While emergency and CBE programmes have been extremely resilient, developing an overreliance on these systems is dangerous, as donors do not typically support multi-year funding for CBEs, which means that this strategy relies on transition to the overburdened public system. Many displaced children subsequently end up dropping out of school as a result of the lack of resources within the government educational system.

The former Government of Afghanistan had a clear policy on the transition between CBE and public education. There were efforts to bring children from community-based classes towards "hub" schools that would prepare them for formal secondary schools, as there are few CBEs above grade 6. There were exchanges as a part of this transition process, where children would have the opportunity to visit hub schools and gradually get accustomed to their new public educational environment. However, this transition often never occurred, given the shortage of hub schools within the country. In order to support these transitions, greater commitment from the Government and donors is required to build more classrooms, hire more teachers and ensure adequate supplies of school equipment as well as mobilize communities to support education in public schools.

At the time of writing, the Taliban have not yet formally announced their policy framework around education; thus, many uncertainties remain. Since they took over the leadership of the country in August 2021, they have announced that girls and boys will now be taught separately by teachers of their own gender. Although schools were reopened officially in mid-September, only boys were allowed to attend from grade 7 onwards (Bellamy, 2021). Although the Taliban have publicly stated that they are working on reopening girls' high schools, this has yet to occur (Reuters, 2021). In practice, segregating teaching will be logistically impossible, particularly in rural areas, as there was already a shortage of female teachers prior to the Taliban's government takeover. Even if female teachers were brought in from neighbouring areas, this goal would be extremely difficult to sustain. Most women with the capacity to teach are in specific districts in the country as a result of concentrated investments in education over the past decade or so, with very few in rural areas. Media reports have also highlighted that the non-payment of teacher's salaries has disproportionately impacted female teachers, particularly those in rural areas. Any educational segregation policies will need to factor in a potential transitional period to allow for mass recruitment and training of new and female teachers to make up for the shortfall. Formal clarification of and education stakeholder input to the new regime's education policy remains essential.

The implication of funding cuts

Many of the school improvement programmes within Afghanistan have been donor funded, mostly through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which was administered by the World Bank on

behalf of donor partners (Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund, 2021). Since the Taliban takeover, donor aid has dwindled; for example, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank cut all aid to Afghanistan and suspended their operations (*BBC News,* 2021). As a result, the de facto authorities themselves have not been able to adequately fund education. While government funding solutions for health programmes have already been announced, there have not yet been similar announcements for education (Associated Press, 2021).

There is a need for strong advocacy and international political engagement to demonstrate to the new regime that education must be a priority, particularly for displaced children and for girls. Furthermore, it is imperative that education programme funding is restarted through new channels as rapidly as possible. Unfortunately, much of the investment from the last 20 years is unlikely to be sustainable due to recent abrupt changes in policy positions. There are potential opportunities for donors to look to neighbouring countries such as Qatar and Pakistan, which have developed stronger education systems as the result of sustained support from both governments and parents. These examples could be potentially adopted and adapted in Afghanistan as an effective way of demonstrating the importance of education to the new de facto government.

Save the Children believes that education is life-saving. Research has demonstrated that looking across levels of nutrition, children who are malnourished are more likely to have illiterate parents. Studies carried out in Pakistan on childhood malnutrition found that uneducated and/or illiterate parents tended to have lower incomes and larger families, and thus more limited ability to spend money on food (Asim and Nawaz, 2018). Moreover, a study by the University of Oxford found that children who are malnourished during their early childhood years experience severe disadvantages in their ability to learn and process information (Oxford News Blog, 2021). We are at a critical juncture in Afghanistan's history, and investment in education is essential to securing the prospects of the country's next generation. ■

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Higher education as a complementary pathway to protection for Afghan students: Historical and current experiences, and thoughts for the future

Ceri Oeppen and Tahir Zaman[1]

Third-country education as a complementary pathway to protection is an area of refugee policy that has expanded under the Global Compact on Refugees. This paper explores the possibilities of higher (tertiary) education as a pathway to protection for Afghan students and provides an opportunity to share some personal reflections on the events of August and September 2021 in relation to Afghans set to study in the United Kingdom under the Chevening Scholarship programme, which highlights some of the challenges of using training programmes as a route to refugee protection. The authors suggest that education is a possible pathway to protection for a small subset of Afghans, in practice implementation is complex and often ad hoc, and it should not be used by Western governments as a political justification for eroding or erasing other routes to protection.

Complementary pathways to protection: Education

Third-country education is part of a portfolio of what the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), IOM and others refer to as complementary pathways to protection. These include reunification, study programmes, labour mobility and community sponsorship – usually, but not always, from a third-country setting (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and UNHCR, 2021). Van Selm (2020) provides a useful summary of the administrative evolution of such pathways in Europe, which highlights their development since the mid-2010s in response to the political obstacles to achieving any of the "three durable solutions" to refugee displacement, as well as attempts to manage public concerns about refugee integration.

This is an area of refugee protection policy that expanded under the Global Compact on Refugees, including the creation of a Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways in early 2020. Administratively, education as a pathway to protection is a complex area. Educational pathways might be based on bilateral or trilateral agreements, they might target subgroups of refugees from particular countries or regions, they might be part of government policy, or schemes developed by charitable foundations or individual universities. An additional consideration is that while "traditional" refugee resettlement – in theory – should be based on vulnerabilities and protection needs, educational pathways clearly include other criteria, including qualifications, age and language skills. As van Selm (ibid.) highlights, this "integration potential" may make the public in receiving countries more amenable to education pathways versus other forms of resettlement, but it also limits who can access this protection route.

While there are third-country education pathways aimed specifically at refugees, education has also long been a way in which limited numbers of educated elite from conflict countries are able to access safer locations, without having to apply for refugee status; and scholarships for higher education study abroad are an aspirational option for Afghan youth more generally, irrespective of their social status or protection needs. In 2019, over 31,000 Afghans were studying at higher education institutions abroad, primarily in India, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Türkiye (UNESCO, n.d.). This adds to the complexity of education as a complementary pathway to protection, as scholarships aimed at refugees as part of an explicit route to resettlement, and student visas (aimed at temporary stays) may both be stepping stones to longer term protection.

The authors have a personal as well as academic interest in this protection policy field, having worked with Afghan students who have attended the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom as Chevening scholars. The Chevening Scholarship programme is funded by the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and people from selected countries to do a one-year master's degree in the United Kingdom and "offers a unique opportunity for future leaders, influencers, and decision-makers from all over the world to develop professionally and academically, network extensively, experience UK culture, and build lasting positive relationships with the United Kingdom" (Chevening, n.d.). The stated intention is that scholars return to their own country afterwards. However,

in August 2021, this education opportunity rapidly turned into a route to protection for a small number of Afghans; and the challenges that has raised for the individuals involved and their families, as well as local authorities and universities, raise questions about how prepared governments, local authorities and the higher education sector are to manage existing education-related pathways, let alone expand them into pathways to protection.

The shifting international higher education sector

The volume of international students in tertiary (higher) education worldwide has grown by an average of almost 5 per cent per year between 1998 and 2018 (OECD, 2020). Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States of America are all key destinations; however, increasingly, higher education is becoming a more global market, with new entrants,

including non-OECD countries, representing higher sector growth than OECD countries (ibid.). The growth of the tertiary education sector in the United Arab Emirates is indicative: despite hosting lower total international student numbers than major destinations like Australia, the United Kingdom or the United States, the United Arab Emirates' inbound mobility rate of 73 per cent of tertiary students is one of the highest in the world (in comparison, the United States' rate is 5.2%) (UNESCO, n.d.).

The table gives some examples of UNESCO statistics on global flows of tertiary students in 2019, with a focus on students from selected conflict countries.

Table 1. Global flows of tertiary students, 2019

Selected coutries of study	Total inbound tertiary-level international students	Percentage from selected countries of origin				
		Afghanistan	Syrian Arab Republic	Iraq	Somalia	Yemen
United States	976 853	*	0.1	0.1	-	-
Australia	509 160	-	-	0.1	-	-
United Kingdom	489 019	-	-	0.1	-	-
Germany	333 233	0.1	3.7	0.2	-	0.2
Türkiye	154 505	4.4	17.5	4.9	2.4	2.0
India	49 348	9.1	1.2	0.9	1.2	2.9
Islamic Republic of Iran	24 379	53.9	3.0	26.1	No data	0.4
Qatar	13 712	0.1	6.0	1.8	1.9	8.5

* Neglible amount.
Source: UNESCO, n.d.

While the UNESCO data do not show whether these students arrived on student visas or were already in country, the statistics indicate that people have pursued education independently as a route to move away, or stay away, from conflict-affected countries, and that this is particularly significant in neighbouring or regional countries. For Afghans, this data indicates that study in the West is only an option for a tiny proportion (see also OECD and UNHCR, 2018 and 2021).

Historical and recent international scholarship opportunities for Afghan students

While education in another country can be a pathway to protection (whether formally labelled as such or not), most of the funded international scholarships available to Afghans over the last 20 years have not been aimed at protection. Instead, the focus has been on training, education and skills, with the intention of students returning with enhanced capacity for facilitating and leading post-conflict reconstruction, development and economic growth in Afghanistan. Talking to Afghans who have studied at the University of Sussex over the last decade, this is often their stated aim too – to learn skills to return and contribute to Afghanistan, and this is reflected in their subject choices too (such as conflict, security and development, development finance and sustainable development). Scholarships have been available for small numbers of Afghans to study across Europe, North America and Australia, as well as for larger numbers in the region, particularly India where thousands of scholarships have been a key part of India's development assistance to Afghanistan (Mullen, 2015).

However, it is not only the last 20 years that have seen select groups of Afghans studying abroad. Between the 1960s and 1980s, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, but particularly the former Soviet Union and the United States, provided international scholarships to members of the urban Afghan middle and upper classes (Majrooh, 1987). During the cold war, both the former Soviet Union and the United States provided thousands of scholarships for Afghans to study abroad either in the donor country or at overseas institutions such as the American University in Beirut. Alumni from American and former Soviet Union universities went on to be key political actors in recent Afghan history, from leaders of the Afghan communists in the 1970s and 1980s (such as Nour Mohammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin), to more recent political leaders (such as Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah) (Oeppen, 2009).

Both now and then, international scholarships and other forms of educational exchange for people from transitional or fragile States, including Afghanistan, have been more a tool of diplomacy and "soft power" influence than a means of protection. This internationalization of higher education has had "profound changes in social and cultural relations" (Findlay et al., 2011:128). In countries affected by conflict, it is those with access to social and cultural capital in the first instance who are able to access these opportunities (Waters, 2012). They are the future political and cultural influencers in their country of origin, as the Chevening Scholarships explicitly state. Consequently, international scholarships serve multiple purposes for donor countries. While they may contribute to development objectives, they also expose students to the cultural, economic and political norms of the donor country, with the more-or-less implicit intention that this will then influence their future decisions and lead them to propagate such norms in their country of origin. They also provide an international alumni of potentially influential people who have a connection with the donor country and perhaps feelings of gratitude to that country. There is, therefore, an important distinction to make between the majority of scholarships that were available to Afghans and wider discussions about education as a complementary pathway to protection.

This is not to say that scholarships for Afghans do not play a protection role, and indeed for some, staying on at the end of their studies or later returning to their country of study, has been a route to protection. However, that has not been the intention of most scholarships aimed at Afghan students. This includes the Chevening Scholarships to the United Kingdom, which had to shift rapidly from one with a training and diplomatic aim, to a pathway to protection, after the Taliban gained control of Kabul in August 2021.

Chevening Scholarships in the United Kingdom – from training to protection?

In 2021, 35 Afghans were awarded Chevening Scholarships to start UK-based master's degrees in September, but in early August, the British Embassy in Kabul – which was due to process the scholars' final award letters that would in turn enable their student visas – informed them that "current circumstances" meant that they would not be processed and would have to defer their studies until 2022.[2]

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[2] A screenshot of the correspondence is available here: Rory Stewart [@Rory StewartUK] (14 August 2021), "Deeply disappointing to hear - on top of everything - that Afghans who received Scholarships from the UK government to study in the UK this year have now been told they will not be granted visas due to "administration issues" [Tweet]. Available at twitter.com/RoryStewartUK/status/1426558342709891078?s=20.

Taliban takeover and saw their scholarships as a route out of Afghanistan to safety – as a pathway to protection. This was especially important as Afghan Chevening scholars are drawn from educated young people (female and male) who, in most cases, have worked in a significant role either in the Government of Afghanistan or an international organization; thus, they are understandably fearful of targeted persecution by the Taliban. Secondly, at the point where they were told they would have to defer their studies, most of them had already either handed in their resignation or arranged unpaid leave, and made arrangements for their families, in expectation of leaving for the United Kingdom in a month's time. Thirdly, being awarded a highly competitive Chevening Scholarship is difficult, only achievable via several previous attainments; these scholarships are something that recipients have planned for and worked towards for many years and even if it was unclear in early August exactly how quickly the Taliban would take power, it was clear that they would likely be in power in 2022, and unlikely to let the students take up their deferred scholarship places.

Initially, FCDO stood firm on the deferral. However, the Chevening scholars are selected because of their profile and abilities as "future leaders"; they were well connected with global networks, including Chevening alumni networks, journalists and politicians with connections to Afghanistan, and their chosen universities in the United Kingdom. Through their networking, they raised awareness of their situation both publicly and "behind the scenes", across the British political spectrum and higher education sector. Consequently, universities set to receive Chevening scholars were writing to the Chevening Secretariat, the FCDO, and lobbying the Government through Universities UK International (a representative body for 140 United Kingdom universities) (University of Sussex, 2021). Publicly, social media posts from politicians and university staff were picked up by the media resulting in an article on the BBC website on 15 August (Therrien and Lee, 2021), which led to further media coverage and raised greater awareness among the wider public. By the evening of that same day, Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated on Sky News Television that the Government would accelerate the Chevening scholars' visas, and they were eventually called forward to Kabul International Airport and evacuated, arriving in the United Kingdom from 24 August onwards.

Readers will be aware of the dangers faced by evacuees at the Kabul International Airport, also movingly described by one of the authors' students

(Bealing, 2021; Zafary and Arnold, 2021). However, they have also faced challenges after arrival in the United Kingdom. The Chevening Scholarships are not designed as a "pathway to protection"; they are designed as a one-year programme of study. Normally, Chevening scholars come to the United Kingdom on their own and then return to their country of citizenship afterwards. The administrative structure of the programme was not designed to deal with evacuated students and their dependants, and this was compounded by immigration systems in the United Kingdom also unready to cope with evacuations.[3]

At the time of writing, the United Kingdom's immigration status of the Afghan Chevening scholars is still unclear. Although it seems likely that they will be given indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom (United Kingdom, Home Office, 2020), this is not yet formally confirmed, for example to local authorities or universities. This lack of confirmed status raises questions about whose responsibility it is to provide protection, and more immediately, to house them; should they be treated (in immigration terms) as refugees or students? While those without dependants have largely been housed on university campuses, some of those with dependants remained in COVID quarantine hotels for over three weeks after arrival, despite negative COVID tests, simply because it is not clear who should house them, local councils or the UK Home Office. Local councils have still not had it officially confirmed who is responsible for the costs of housing Chevening scholars with dependants, and the scholars and their families remain in temporary "bridging accommodation".

While not designed as a complementary pathway to protection, for this year's Afghan cohort of 35 and some of their dependants, a Chevening Scholarship has become a de facto pathway, and is just one part of what appears to be a mosaic of ad hoc routes to evacuation, and hopefully eventual protection, by a small subset of the Afghan population.

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[3] Some Afghan Chevening scholars were able to bring their dependants, others were not, due to the dangers of the situation at Kabul International Airport and/ or dependants' disabilities or other practical obstacles. The situation for their dependants remaining in Afghanistan is one of high vulnerability (see *BBC News,* 2021).

Future international education opportunities for Afghans

According to information shared at a recent webinar on complementary pathways, some countries are expanding their scholarship programmes for Afghan students in response to the crisis (Japan), while other countries are establishing new ones (Bulgaria) (Migration Policy Institute, 2021). Nevertheless, the logistics of these programmes and how they will intersect with Afghans' protection needs are unclear. As the Chevening example shows, scholarship programmes are not usually designed as a means of protection and the logistics of managing scholarship applications from Afghanistan are clearly going to be difficult for the foreseeable future. For example, while the United States' State Department said in August that the Fulbright Program would continue to operate, Afghan students who were shortlisted in 2021 are still awaiting selection interviews, although they were due to start their scholarships this academic year (Stacey, 2021).

It is, of course, difficult to predict what the future holds for Afghan university students, particularly female students. This includes uncertainty around international education opportunities. According to Afghan news outlet *TOLOnews*, the Taliban's Ministry of Higher Education has announced that it will launch its own study abroad programme (Morwat, 2021). However, it seems reasonable to expect that the Taliban will place limitations on allowable destinations. If international scholarships continue to be available, will the Taliban allow both male and female students to access them? Will they be allowed to return safely to Afghanistan, especially if they involve studying in Western countries like the United Kingdom or the United States? Or will all scholarships become de facto resettlement programmes, as those who take them up are unable to return?

As well as expanding and initiating scholarship programmes for Afghans in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, it is also clear that protection routes are needed for those already at universities outside Afghanistan, including access to permanent legal status after graduation, and logistical and financial support for those who have had assets in Afghanistan frozen such as fee waivers (Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways, 2021). Then, there is the additional question of alumni. What responsibility are countries who have previously benefited from Afghan international students going to take on for their future protection?

Conclusion

As van Selm (2020:139) highlights, complementary pathways to protection are "relatively new, appearing in Europe only since 2013; and they have yet to be thoroughly evaluated". Educational pathways are a highly complex policy field where refugee protection intersects with highly skilled immigration policy, education policy, diplomatic aims, the neoliberal business model of much of the tertiary education sector, and the work of philanthropic and private sector organizations. The "subjects" of this protection policy area include students in Afghanistan itself, in neighbouring countries and those already studying abroad who are now unable to return; arguably, it also includes returning alumni of programmes like Chevening and Fulbright whose connections to the West may now arouse suspicion and persecution by the Taliban. There are also the tens of thousands of Afghans who are studying abroad outside of scholarship programmes.

UNHCR (2021) is clear that complementary pathways are not substitutes to "durable solutions" of resettlement, local integration and return. Education is a possible pathway to protection for a small subset of Afghans, but in practice, implementation and the linking of scholarships to protection has been largely ad hoc so far. There is scope for educational pathways to provide innovative solutions to displacement, but the experience of supporting Afghan students this summer has seemed more about improvisation and informal networking (with all the inequalities of access contained within that) than innovation. While the authors support any routes that provide assistance and protection to Afghans, particularly students and alumni, their concern is that policymakers search for innovative solutions such as complementary pathways, which are ultimately aimed at those with high integration potential, will be used as a political justification for eroding other routes to protection or excuse political failures to promote other durable solutions. ■

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Resettlement: Routes to safety for Afghans left behind[1]

Abdul Ghafoor Rafiey[2]

Afghans and resettlement: A history of marginalization

Historically, resettlement from third countries has been a challenging and lengthy process for Afghans. Asylum claims from Afghans in the European Union are often rejected and not covered by special resettlement and relocation regimes (Pitonak and Beşer, 2017). Over 570,000 Afghans have applied for asylum in the European Union since 2015, comprising the second largest country of origin population in 2020 (Siebold and Chalmers, 2021). Rejection rates for first-time Afghan asylum seekers remained high – hovering at around 52 per cent between 2008 and 2016. Although acceptances have increased for Afghan asylum seekers in the European Union in mid-2021 – to 62 per cent – this number is relatively low in comparison to acceptance rates for other conflict zones such as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (84% accepted) (Eurostat, 2021). In recent years, those applying for resettlement from countries outside Europe have been subject to the same kind of treatment as the thousands of Afghans who enter Europe directly to apply for asylum, facing marginalization and long waiting times for their claims to be processed.

Prior to 2015, Afghans applying for resettlement from third countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia received better treatment, with faster processing times for their cases. Resettlement programmes for Afghans existed for Australia, Canada, the United States of America and many other countries. However, following events in 2015, larger numbers of refugees from countries such as the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq began to come to Europe directly and apply for resettlement from third countries. This impacted Afghans who were similarly applying for resettlement, namely increasing processing times for their applications filed for these programmes. The 2016 European Union–Türkiye deal provided pathways to resettlement for Syrians in Europe; unfortunately, this did not apply to Afghan asylum seekers. Under this deal, Afghan asylum seekers and refugees have been returned to Türkiye under the assumption that they will have adequate access to protection (International Rescue Committee, 2016). However, only those asylum seekers fleeing persecution in Europe are considered, as Türkiye applies geographic limitations to the 1951 Refugee Convention (ibid.). There are reports of people in countries such as Indonesia who have been waiting for five to seven years for resettlement. The majority of Afghan asylum seekers in Indonesia are required to live in detention centres, even those who have been granted asylum by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This has provoked frequent demonstrations, where Afghans in detention centres have taken collective action to protest their conditions (Giotis, 2019; Pitonak, 2018). As a result, Afghans began to file claims for resettlement via alternative countries, such as Azerbaijan and Tajikistan; but even there the waiting time has continued to increase.

Current challenges to reaching third countries: Border closures and exploitation

In the immediate aftermath of the fall of Kabul and the former Government of Afghanistan, the evacuation process devolved into chaos, as Afghans rushed to leave the country prior to the 31 August deadline for the United States and Western military withdrawal (Doucet, 2021). People did what they could to get out; some were able to successfully escape.

However, thousands of Afghans from those on evacuation lists remained stuck in Afghanistan, with any future evacuations from the country remaining highly unlikely post-U.S. troop withdrawal. As a result, some left for neighbouring countries such as Pakistan in hopes of resettlement. The author has been in contact with dozens of people in Pakistan, and there is a huge gap between resettlement policies in theory and in practice. For example, Germany had been in contact with the Pakistani Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs regarding those individuals who had already been granted humanitarian visas, but were unable to get out of the country. It was agreed that three or four buses would be brought to the Torkham border carrying individuals on a specific list, who would be allowed to enter – even without a

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[1] The following contribution is an edited transcript of a conversation with Abdul Ghafoor Rafiey.

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passport or visa – in order to process their cases via the German Embassy in Islamabad. After this, they would be flown out of the country. However, when several buses arrived at the border, they were halted by border forces, who claimed they were unaware of the existence of this agreement.

There have also been first-hand reports of former Afghan female police and security forces officers that attempted to cross the Afghanistan–Pakistan border, and who are currently wanted by Pakistani security forces and were taken in for investigation. These practices further complicate the ability of refugees in third countries to apply for resettlement. At the time of writing, UNHCR is not currently registering Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan for resettlement programmes to third countries. Overall, the options for resettlement of Afghan refugees from third countries are extremely limited.

In addition, Afghans face barriers when travelling from Afghanistan to third countries. There are numerous cases of previous returnees who have attempted to enter the Islamic Republic of Iran, only to be arrested and immediately deported (Amnesty International, 2021). There are also reports of people being shot by border guards while trying to cross into the Islamic Republic of Iran (Noorzai, 2021). Minority Hazara groups have also faced additional discrimination, with smugglers demanding elevated prices for the journey across the border into Pakistan. Additionally, during the period of evacuations in Kabul, the Taliban refused entry to the airport to several Hazaras. There have been reports of border guards refusing anyone they identify as Hazara entry into third countries, or demanding an additional USD 1,000–15,000, even for those who possess the required visas. The process of crossing into third countries via these borders is completely unmonitored, leaving Afghans at the mercy of customs and border agents who know any attempts to profit financially from these groups' desperation will go unchecked. At the time of writing, the author has been in touch with an Afghan woman who is trying to enter Pakistan, in order to travel to Austria to join her husband. She was travelling with two of her children and Pakistani border guards demanded USD 400 for entry with no explanation. These issues must be raised by European countries when making agreements with third countries around resettlement to avoid continued exploitation.

European negotiations to open evacuation routes

Negotiations between European countries and the Taliban will be essential to facilitate direct resettlement from Afghanistan in the future. There will need to be agreements for specific lists of people to pass through Taliban checkpoints to get to the airport, in order to continue evacuations. Resettlement agreements need to be framed as a humanitarian process, without any financial incentives to the Taliban government to facilitate this process.

If this is not possible, European countries should enter into agreements with neighbouring countries – such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan and Uzbekistan – with which the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has a stronger influence and better relationship. However, this is often a highly bureaucratic process with high possibility of failed implementation, as seen most recently in Pakistan.

Afghans have continued to be marginalized under recently developed European policies on resettlement. At the time of writing, the European Union has not come out with a unified response for Afghan asylum seekers. Since the dissolution of the Government of Afghanistan in August 2021, the European Union has evacuated 22,000 people from Afghanistan to 24 European Union member States – which mainly included European Union officials and their dependants, as well as Afghans who supported European Union operations in the country (Shankar, 2021). Individual countries such as Ireland have established an Afghan Admission Programme to facilitate family reunification, which plans to provide up to 500 additional places for Afghan family members (Department of Justice, Government of Ireland, 2021). Horst Seehofer, the German Interior Minister, warned that the European Union should avoid setting targets for the numbers of Afghans to be resettled to the union, claiming that it will trigger a "pull effect" (Boffey, 2021). This was echoed by French President Emmanuel Macron, who called for a European Union initiative to focus on "the fight against irregular flows, solidarity in the effort, the harmonization of protection criteria and the establishment of cooperation with transit and host countries such as Pakistan, Turkey or Iran" (Leali, 2021).

While Germany has pledged to offer temporary residence permits to 2,600 Afghans who are deemed vulnerable or at risk (*Deutsche Welle,* 2021), including human rights activists, journalists and artists, the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) is not currently processing any applications for asylum for Afghans, neither new applications nor follow-up applications (Hanewinkel, 2021; Eichborn, 2021). The Ministry of Interior has stated that they are waiting for a situation report on Afghanistan from the Foreign Ministry, which will be used as the basis for asylum decisions. Afghanistan is currently the main country of origin for asylum seekers in Germany after the Syrian Arab Republic, and in the first eight months of 2021, 21,505 Afghans had already filed an initial application for asylum in Germany, which is an increase of over 145 per cent compared to the same period last year. There has been no indication of how long this pause on processing applications will last for. It is also affecting Afghans who were evacuated by other European countries, such as Italy, Portugal and Spain, who are now attempting to file claims within Germany.

Advocacy strategies: A way forward

Moving forward, the Afghan diaspora has a key role to play in Europe, as well as in Australia and North America. Key actions include working to meet local members of Parliament and other politicians to create opportunities for those who are left behind, and using media to increase awareness of the current situation, particularly the plight of marginalized groups such as women and Hazaras. Since arriving in Germany, the author has received dozens of emails and WhatsApp messages from people on a daily basis trying to leave. With support of the German Afghan diaspora, the author was able to put several people on the German evacuation lists prior to the end of August.

The activists group Afghanistan–Australian Advocacy Network (AAAN) have successfully created momentum through a campaign using the hashtag #ActionForAfghanistan, calling on the Government to expand their commitment on humanitarian resettlement places from 3,000 to 20,000 (Action for Afghanistan, n.d.). This increase would bring the Government of Australia's pledge in line with commitments from countries such as the United Kingdom, and go further to reflect the level of need for protection that there currently is. Indeed, after the announcement of the 3,000 places, Australia received over 100,000 applications from Afghans (Hurst, 2021).

On the citizen level, there have also been fundraising and activist efforts to directly support individual case of resettlement. In this instance, individual sponsorship over a period of several years can facilitate the resettlement process for individuals or families. Several Afghans have managed to be resettled from countries such as Indonesia to Canada due to the efforts of groups of activists who fundraised to cover the costs of sponsoring specific individuals and facilitated the processing of their cases. For those Afghans remaining within Afghanistan, such advocacy and sponsorship efforts are essential to facilitating increased resettlement, with safe pathways to seeking asylum. ■

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Legal identity in Afghanistan

Katherine James and Margo Baars[1]

Nearly 5 million people are internally displaced in Afghanistan (Amnesty International, 2021), facing a number of barriers to access to legal identity and civil registration. With 15,600 internally displaced persons (IDPs) reported to have arrived in Kabul between 1 July and 13 August 2021, and 681,300 new people displaced internally throughout the country between 1 January and 1 November 2021, identification, registration and response cut across legal and humanitarian obligations (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, n.d.). When, in August 2021, evacuations out of the country increased, once again the question of those possessing legal identification documents and travel documents came to the fore. As this article explains, legal identity in Afghanistan has been a hurdle for Afghans for governments in the last 20 years – and solutions are currently in limbo following the overthrow of the Ghani administration. What does access to identification and documentation mean for Afghans under the new de facto government led by the Taliban?

Introduction

Passports became a key priority for Afghans contemplating migration or preparing to seek asylum abroad in the months leading up to the Taliban insurgency and eventual collapse of the former Government of Afghanistan. Reports documented long lines of hopeful applicants stretching for a hundred metres in front of the Kabul passport office, with one police officer reporting 10,000 daily visitors – a five-fold increase from previous averages of 2,000 daily visitors (AFP, 2021a). However, demand could not be met before the collapse of the Government in August, and many inside Afghanistan still lack any form of legal identity.

The international mobility of those without a passport remains limited. Crossing international borders without documentation, a decision many Afghans have historically made and continued to make as the advance progressed, places migrants at greater risk of exploitation and can hinder the processing of applications for asylum in host countries. Understanding the current demand for passports and the challenges faced by subgroups of the population in obtaining them is key to addressing urgent legal identification needs in Afghanistan, given the current security and political context.

Although passports are a key feature of the current gaps in the Afghan legal identity system, the question of the e-tazkira – the electronic national identity card in Afghanistan – has been the key priority since its distribution was officially launched in 2018 by then President Ashraf Ghani, and had become a prerequisite for securing a passport earlier in 2021. The biometric e-tazkira was to replace earlier, paper tazkira documents. Although e-tazkira distribution efforts increased in 2021, with issuing offices established in the provinces, registration and distribution were not coherent and equitable throughout the country. Many hoped that implementation of the tazkirae-tazkira would provide an easier operational path for Afghans to access services and other documentation, and was cited by the former president as a means to include marginalized or displaced populations, and to provide a more secure and reliable method of identity verification.

However, the former Government of Afghanistan was split over questions of nationality and ethnicity and how to reflect these aspects of identity on the new cards. The 2018 tazkirae-tazkira official launch sparked protests in many central provinces north of Kabul (Behnood and Ahmad, 2018). Distribution of tazkirae-tazkira remained slow until 2021, which saw an increase in efforts to boost distribution. Before 15 August 2021, tazkirae-tazkiras were primarily distributed in Kabul and larger cities, exacerbating rural–urban divides in identification and documentation access (Country of Origin Information Centre (LandInfo), 2019). The Taliban announced at the end of September 2021 that they would be making changes to both identity cards and passports, but that documents issued by the previous government would be considered valid in the interim (Ray, 2021).

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Legal identification in Afghanistan pre-Taliban

Tazkira and tazkirae-tazkira: Afghanistan's national identity card

Prior to the Taliban takeover of the Government, the tazkira/tazkirae-tazkira – the national identity card – was the most important identification document in Afghanistan, being a requirement for Afghans to access education, employment, health care, loans and housing, land and property certificates (NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, 2018). According to the 2014 Law on Registration of Population Records, all Afghan citizens in theory possess a tazkira. However, in practice, the cards are held by around 60 per cent of the population – and are significantly less common among displaced people and women (Embassy of Afghanistan, n.d.). Barriers to access are particularly high for specific groups, such as for those Afghans displaced to peri-urban and urban areas of the country. The tazkira is issued based on verification by witnesses from a person's home village, and those who are mobile or displaced therefore face difficulties. Women too face specific challenges linked to gender and cultural norms. Those who lack documentation and identification are hampered in their ability to access basic services and credit.

Six versions of the tazkira were in circulation at the time of the government change in August 2021. The high variability in tazkira application procedures and format led to debates among stakeholders regarding which versions of the document should be considered acceptable forms of legal identity (Adili and Bjelica, 2018; *Afghanistan Times*, 2021). Political leaders began discussing the introduction of the tazkirae-tazkira – a plastic identity card with an electronic chip – in February 2009. Former president Hamid Karzai prioritized the project ahead of the 2014 presidential elections with the aim of reducing voter fraud (Bjelica and van Bijlert, 2016). Expediting the introduction of the tazkirae-tazkira meant that little time was allocated to the testing and correction of technical issues and discussions surrounding its design and content (Mobasher, 2018). Additional procedures were added to verify applicants' identity; adult applicants were required to provide biometric data and appear in person to the local authorities (ibid.).

The listing of ethnic groups on the tazkirae-tazkira, based on the father's ethnic identity, supported by former President Ashraf Ghani, sparked widespread criticism across the country. However, the alternative of printing "Afghan" as a national identity on the cards was opposed by non-Pashtun ethnic groups, as many perceive this term to be synonymous with Pashtun and thus an inaccurate representation of their ethnic identity. The former Government of Afghanistan rejected a decree proposed by the president in 2017 to include nationality, religion and ethnicity on the tazkira. Currently, e-tazkiras feature both the ethnic identity from the father's side, as well as specifying Afghan as a national identity (Behnood and Ahmad, 2018). Debates persisted as politicians continued to propose amendments to the law prior to the Taliban insurgency and government takeover in August 2021 (Shalizi, 2018).

Widening urban–rural gaps. Access to tazkiras and tazkirae-tazkiras has varied significantly by province, urban and rural areas and for vulnerable groups, such as IDPs, women and children (Samuel Hall and NRC, 2016). Afghans residing in urban areas, in particular Kabul, are more likely to possess legal identification than those in rural areas, locations where offices were the most functional and resourced (Landinfo, 2019:6). Though gender inequality in civil documentation is evident worldwide, Afghanistan has the largest gender gap in ID possession (Samuel Hall and NRC, 2016:29), with the number of Afghan men in possession of a tazkira nearly twice the number of Afghan women (Hanmer and Elefante, 2019:1). This may be linked to unequal legal procedures, as until 2010, women were required to bring a male witness to renew their tazkira (World Bank, 2018:1). Furthermore, tazkira possession remains low among IDPs, as travelling to their district of origin to apply and identify witnesses is often rendered impossible by both insecurity and transport costs (NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, 2018). Lack of documentation as proof of identity and citizenship creates a cycle of vulnerability, where families lack IDs for multiple generations, ultimately hampering durable solutions for displacement due to the inability of those without identification to access basic services in Afghanistan for both themselves and their families (REACH, 2018).

Passports

Afghan passports were handwritten until 2012, when the Government began to issue machine-readable biometric passports. At the end of 2017, handwritten Afghan passports were deemed invalid (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2018). Although there is no published data on the total percentage of passport holders in Afghanistan, around 900,000 biometric passports had been issued in total as of 2016 (*TOLOnews,* 2019). Tazkiras are prerequisites for obtaining passports, which are issued from the sole passport office in Kabul with validity periods of five years (Samuel Hall and NRC, 2016:14). Ordinary non-diplomatic passports cost 5,000 Afghan afghani (AFN) and take between

ten days to over four months to process (Landinfo, 2016; Samuel Hall and NRC, 2016). Per Article 25 of the Passport Law, children without a parent or legal guardian and those with over AFN 50,000 in debt from the Government are ineligible for passports (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Afghanistan, n.d.).

The need for passports in Afghanistan remains urgent; as the Taliban took control over Kabul on 15 August 2021, many hoped to flee the country. However, many with plans to exit were left behind, as they lacked valid passports (Bell, 2021). Passports and tazkiras are often required to obtain the majority of special immigrant visas (SIVs) from Western countries, and the procedures for acquiring documents is difficult under the current context due to closed consulates, Taliban checkpoints and destroyed documents (Abramson, 2015). The de facto Interior Ministry announced that it would resume issuing passports to citizens on 9 October 2021. Abdul Gul Haqqani – the current acting head of the passport office – announced plans to issue 5,000–6,000 passports per day, with plans to employ female staff to process the documents of Afghan women (Guy and Lister, 2021). Following this announcement, hundreds of Afghans gathered outside the passport office in Kabul. However, many uncertainties remain, and the Taliban have specified that they will be solely processing applications for those who had previously applied (*Al Jazeera*, 2021). Up to 25,000 passports are ready to be issued, with a further 100,000 applications in the early processing stages (*Daily Sabah*, 2021).

There remains a stark urban/rural divide regarding access and possession of civil documentation, as these documents are often less necessary for the fulfilment of daily tasks in rural areas. Rural households are less likely to view these documents as required for all household members, especially if procuring documents requires travel to provincial capitals. Lastly, the costs associated with passports/tazkirae-tazkira are prohibitive for many, especially given the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Taliban takeover, which has left many unable to afford the associated costs with procuring these documents.

Over the last several years, UNICEF has been involved in increasing birth registrations in Afghanistan. Although birth certificates are required under Afghan law, limited resources and decades of conflict have left the country with a weak civil registration system. Prior to August 2021, the Ministries of Interior and Health were working together jointly to ensure birth registration was integrated within Afghanistan's health-care system (Khaliqyar, 2017). However, at present, Afghanistan's public health system is close to collapse, as the cuts to financial inflows from international donors have forced health-care workers and providers in Afghanistan to make difficult decisions due to increasingly limited resources. The breakdown in health services has impacted access to basic health care, emergency response and COVID-19 vaccination (UN News, 2021). Mothers who have given birth under the Taliban reported basic levels of care, including no pain relief, cut power and a lack of generators due to the freeze on international aid (Jung and Maroof, 2021).

The importance of access to legal documentation in the context of humanitarian crisis, migration and displacement

Accessing legal documentation is more important than ever for Afghans, given the current humanitarian crisis. According to the United Nations Development Programme's recent assessment, 97 per cent of the country is at risk of falling into poverty by mid-2022 if the country's political, economic and security crises are not addressed: Afghans must have the means available to them to access services equitably. This pre-existing protection concern for Afghans related to legal identification is becoming increasingly critical, especially for the most vulnerable populations – women, children and IDPs. Previous research carried out on protection challenges for Afghan IDPs discovered that 70 per cent of family members in the study did not hold any identification documents, which made it difficult and often impossible to access aid and services provided by the Government, national and international non-governmental organizations (NRC, IDMC and Samuel Hall, 2018:37). This is borne out by recent protection monitoring undertaken by IOM and protection cluster partners.

Discrimination, marginalization and statelessness. Although the absence of documentation on its own does not render a person stateless, a lack of documentation increases a person's risk of statelessness, especially among children (UNHCR, 2012). Statelessness increases the risk of social exclusion, especially for vulnerable subgroups of a population like women, children and IDPs. Protracted displacement often contributes to statelessness, as it complicates the demonstration of legal links with the country of origin. This is particularly common for the children of Afghan returnees, who often fall between registration systems and lack proof of residence and/or citizenship in both Afghanistan and their previous host country. For example, Afghans who resided in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan for several years often are unable to provide proof of marriage

and births abroad, which makes it impossible for them to procure tazkiras. Stateless women and children are often left unprotected, with stateless women at a particularly high risk of gender-based violence, economic inequality and exclusion from justice systems. These factors tend to increase during times of distress, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the recent conflicts in Afghanistan related to the Taliban insurgency (Chakraborty and Bhabha, 2021). Stateless children are often at risk of being trafficked and abused and often prevented from accessing legal aid (UNHCR, 2012).

Seeking protection abroad has become further complicated for Afghans in the wake of the departure of Western military and diplomatic personnel, as many Afghans cannot leave the country legally. Although the Taliban has assured 100 countries that foreigners and Afghans with foreign papers will be allowed to leave the country (AFP, 2021b), questions remain over those Afghans who were unable to get tazkiras or passports prior to the collapse of the Government: How will they be able to exercise their right to leave the country? The Taliban has not yet elucidated whether it will allow those without documentation to leave the country (Lang et al., 2021). Questions over new documentation and identification formats and regulations under the Taliban have yet to be addressed by the de facto government.

Countries hosting Afghans should grant temporary protection to Afghans – regardless of whether or not they possess documentation – which would allow them to access basic services and humanitarian aid as they wait for their identification to be verified.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has added further hardship for Afghans; the country's already fragile health-care system was under increased strain, as the country grappled with waves of returns from the Islamic Republic of Iran, attacks on health-care workers and increasing insecurity (Kapur, 2021). The pandemic's effects were felt most deeply by vulnerable populations, including women, girls and IDPs. The COVID-19 crisis has increased existing challenges for Afghan women and girls specifically, as gender discrimination and inequality put women and girls more at risk of contracting the virus, as well as limited their mobility and increased overall dependency on male family members for access to basic services (UN-Women, United Nations Population Fund and UNICEF, 2020). Additionally, lockdown measures in the beginning of the pandemic disproportionately affected IDPs who tend to work informal jobs. Food insecurity increased dramatically since the start of the pandemic due to border closures, which contributed to rising food prices (Amnesty International, 2021). Additionally, greater numbers of returnees and ongoing conflict contributed further to

Afghanistan's IDP numbers, further straining limited resources available to both hosts and IDPs (ibid.).

Identification acceptability in humanitarian crises

Given the current security context, which has led to large populations of Afghans arriving in host countries without proper documents for entry or asylum, it is now crucial to evaluate what different States consider acceptable identification in the absence of people being able to secure proper documentation prior to leaving the country. The Government of the United States has also been granting humanitarian parole to some evacuated Afghans, namely those with pending SIV applications (Montoya-Galvez and Sganga, 2021). Neighbouring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have stated they are willing to welcome Afghan refugees temporarily (Putz, 2021). The Government of Uzbekistan initially helped Western governments evacuate Afghans at risk of persecution through its borders. At the time of writing, it is hosting 585 Afghan pilots and their families who fled over the Afghan–Uzbek border after the Taliban took hold of Mazar-i-Sharif on 14 August 2021. The Government of Uzbekistan has continued to provide transit aid to Afghans with German visas or residency (Rittman and Williams, 2021). However, Uzbekistan has not opened its borders to Afghan refugees and is not signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention.

Although regular visa pathways remain available to Afghans in theory, securing documents authorizing travel has been difficult due to Taliban checkpoints, closed consulates and documents destroyed due to security concerns (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

1. Emergency pathways

Some governments have announced emergency pathways for visas for Afghans seeking to leave. Pakistan has relaxed its own visa policies to help journalists and media workers evacuate the country; the Ministry of Interior announced that it would issue visas to this group on a priority basis (Qarar, 2021). The Government of India introduced the e-Emergency X-Misc visa, an e-visa designed to fast-track visa applications for Afghans wishing to enter India. Previously issued Indian visas for Afghans not currently present in India were declared void following this new policy (Bose, 2021). Canada announced a special "path to protection" for Afghan interpreters and past and present embassy employees, including those who worked in support roles (Connolly, 2021). However, all of these efforts are only available to those Afghans in possession of a passport – no countries have announced specific measures or pathways for those populations arriving without identification and documentation.

Given the rapid pace of government collapse and the urgent need to flee, many Afghans have arrived in third countries without documentation or visas, which presents the need to ponder what should be accepted by authorities in the absence of secure documentation in emergency situations. In the wake of the fall of Kabul, the general approach from the Biden administration in evacuating Afghans was to board planes and sort out visas at a later date. However, upon arrival in the United States or third countries such as Qatar, Afghans have faced delays and security challenges as the United States Customs and Border Patrol attempts to identify those without documents (Sands and Perez, 2021).

Although the United States officially evacuated all military and diplomatic personnel, Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) funds could be deployed to continue evacuations, as it is a presidential account that can be drawn from in emergency situations and allow the United States to respond to developing humanitarian needs (InterAction, n.d.). ERMA funds have been used in the past by the Government of the United States to support refugees and IDPs from Somalia, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. They could be used to support the evacuation and reception of Afghan refugees in the United States, such as those Afghans who would qualify for the SIV but were unable to evacuate in time in August 2021. Furthermore, governments should consider developing a coordinated international response for the resettlement of Afghan refugees to streamline the process and availability of information to support Afghan's decision-making.

2. Humanitarian pathways

Expanding legal pathways for Afghans to leave can be linked to establishing humanitarian corridors, which would involve the Taliban granting Afghans safe passage via an orderly departure programme, such as those used for previous conflicts in Viet Nam and Cuba (Higgins, 2021). If combined with resettlement measures, plans for orderly departure via safe land and air corridors, such an initiative would offer a way for Afghans to leave legally. However, countries hosting Afghan refugees need to consider the bar of acceptability in terms of their documentation to facilitate their migration and resettlement, balanced with security considerations. However, this can lead to significant challenges for States, including bottlenecks and delays at customs and border crossings, as authorities attempt to verify identity for those Afghans who have arrived without documentation.

Countries should decriminalize migration for Afghan refugees, including ending arbitrary detention for those who crossed borders in the wake of the Taliban insurgency. In order to facilitate safe migration, countries can establish protection pathways, including granting Afghans and their families humanitarian parole, expanding family reunification programmes and services, and establishing education pathways to increase the number of viable migration options for Afghans.

3. Universal pathways: Laissez-passer in lieu of travel documentation

The right to leave, outlined in General Comment no. 27, Article 12, stipulates that anyone has the right to leave any country, including their own or countries of first asylum (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1999). This right must be secured by the person's country of nationality and the country of departure. Thus, the Taliban are duty bound to let all Afghans with proper documentation leave the territory. Additionally, the right to obtain necessary travel documents is covered under the right to leave. As this represents a barrier for many in Afghanistan – both pre- and post-Taliban – governments should waive visa requirements for Afghan nationals and implement emergency travel and identification documents that will prevent situations where newly arrived Afghan refugees and asylum seekers find themselves stranded at airports as they wait for customs to verify their identities. Furthermore, Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights grants Afghans the right to seek asylum, and Article 31 of the Refugee Convention protects asylum seekers from being penalized for illegal entry, should they lack the required documentation to cross international borders (McDonnell, 2021). At the same time, de facto authorities should be urged to reinstate and facilitate access to legal identity as a matter of urgency.

Based on the current situation and the difficulty the majority of Afghans face in accessing necessary legal documentation and identification to leave the country, the following recommendations outline potential solutions for the international community and host countries receiving Afghan refugees.

Thinking forward: Identity and data protection for Afghans post-Taliban

In addition to challenges over missing identification and documentation, the significance of identity documents often changes during periods of political tension and conflict. The possession of an ID – as well as its design and content – can signal a political affiliation or identity that may place card holders at risk of persecution. The storage of biometric data related to electronic ID cards and passports – including socioeconomic status, ethnicity and gender – is extremely sensitive, as it could be used to target opponents or specific groups. This illustrates the risk associated with these new technologies if certain groups come into possession of biometric data of citizens (Guo and Noori, 2021). Questions over how the Taliban will use Afghanistan's pre-existing digital infrastructure – including for what purpose – is a cause for concern for many Afghans who remain in the country, especially those with connections to the previous government or Western countries.

This is further coupled with the fact that Afghanistan lacks general personal data laws, as well as an agency responsible for the data protection of its citizens. The previous Constitution of Afghanistan provides for the right to confidentiality and the privacy of communications, and there are sectoral laws related to telecommunications and banking, but they do not cover the protection of biometric data of citizens (Data Guidance, n.d.). Although digital identification systems are an important tool for the development of a country, their misuse can have dire consequences for citizens, especially those who have affiliations with groups now considered enemies, or religious and ethnic minorities who risk being targeted (Shoemaker, 2021). In the wake of the Taliban takeover and the collapse of the former Government of Afghanistan, Afghans rushed to delete their digital histories over concerns that their digital footprint would be used to harm them and their families (Chandran, 2021). Afghan women reported hiding their IDs, diplomas and certificates over fears of persecution (*The Guardian*, 2021). Under the former government, the National Statistic and Information Authority processed over 6 million applications for the tazkirae-tazkira biometric identity card, which included fingerprints, iris scans and a photograph of the applicant. This could point the Taliban to potential targets, especially as the current design displays the holder's ethnicity (Vallance, 2021). This counters the goal of legal identification and the overall protection of Afghan citizens (Mobasher, 2018). There is previous evidence of the Taliban using biometric systems to target security force members, which was used to carry out a mass kidnapping in Kunduz in 2017 (*TOLOnews*, 2016b).

In the past, those living in Taliban-controlled areas have been permitted access to the tazkira to benefit from government services. However, there are reports of Taliban beating civil servants for distributing the tazkira, speaking to the "reflexive and reactive" nature of governance by armed groups (Human Rights Watch, 2020). These groups may also weaponize poorly protected e-governance systems for retribution or discrimination (Hosein and Nyst, 2013). The Taliban's seizure of the biometric data of Afghans affiliated with United States forces reveals the risk associated with such systems (Klippenstein and Sirota, 2021). Some may attempt to destroy their own identity documents if they believe them to be incriminating (Stokel-Walker, 2021).◾

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Lifelines: Remittances to Afghanistan[1]

Nicholas Ross and Stefanie Baratt[2]

Remittances sent by Afghans working abroad and diaspora communities have long been critical for households and the wider economy within Afghanistan. Formal remittances in 2020 totalled upwards of 788 million United States dollar (USD) – 4 per cent of Afghanistan's GDP (IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC), n.d. (based on World Bank data)). Following the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan's financial system and the overall economy are debilitated. It is in this context that remittances sent by Afghans abroad are both under strain, as well as more important than ever.

Policy priorities related to remittances centre on three pillars: (a) increasing the understanding of the Afghanistan remittances landscape; (b) supporting the Afghan diaspora and remittance senders; and (c) including remittances in migration and humanitarian policies and practice.

The context of financial freefall

Afghanistan is experiencing a financial squeeze after the Taliban's lightning-fast takeover of the country. The United States froze USD 7 billion of Afghan reserves and the International Monetary Fund shut off financing to the country, including hundreds of millions of dollars in Special Drawing Rights that can be converted into currency during times of crisis.

Despite the resumption of banking in Afghanistan in late August, Afghanistan's Central Bank can only access a fraction of its usual financing. This means that Afghan banks' coffers cannot be easily refilled – there is a shortage of cash and withdrawal limits have been put in place. There are fears of food shortages, higher inflation and a slump in the currency — all resulting in an intensification of the humanitarian emergency across the country. Challenges in the macroeconomic conditions and availability of finances are expected to continue in the years ahead.

Remittances are crucial to Afghan families and the economy as a whole

Remittances were of paramount importance to many Afghan families and to the broader economy even before the latest crises. Afghans working in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Türkiye, Gulf countries, and further afield in Australia, Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States, have been sending money to their families in Afghanistan for decades. With 5.9 million migrants from Afghanistan and diaspora residing abroad (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, n.d.), their support to communities and families back home have been indispensable.

In early 2021, a few months before the Taliban took over Kabul, Samuel Hall partnered with the World Bank to assess the impact of migration on women remaining in Afghanistan. A case study from the research provides an illustration of the wider processes of remittances to Afghanistan. One woman who took part in the research, Zeenat,[3] lived in a rural village where job opportunities have always been sparse. Zeenat's husband had been working in construction in Saudi Arabia for almost a decade, sending home the equivalent of between USD 260 and USD 540 every two months. In discussing how remittances were used, Zeenat said that the funds were used to send the family's children to school, avoid loan sharks and buy essential winter goods for the house. She was not alone: other interviewed women whose husbands were in Gulf countries (mostly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) received monthly or bimonthly remittances ranging from USD 160 to USD 580 each time, an amount usually shared with the extended family of up to 30 people.

Together, remittances sent by Afghan communities abroad form part of a vast financial ecosystem. In the five years from 2016 to 2020, World Bank (2021) calculations of remittances received in Afghanistan totalled over USD 3.8 billion – approximately USD 774 million each year. According to the 2016–2017 Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan,

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[3] All names have been changed so interviewees remain anonymous.

Government of Afghanistan, 2018), remittances represent an income source for almost 1 in every 10 Afghan households. The vast majority of remittance cash flows are irregular, meaning that official statistics may be vast underestimates of the true scope of remittances (Garrote Sanchez, 2018). The money Zeenat's husband sent back formed part of the flow of finances that allowed people within Afghanistan to buy food, pay rent and contribute to the overall economy.

Economists writing for the World Bank (Nyarko and Chartouni, 2018) have cut through the debate of remittances being used primarily for consumption vis-à-vis investment, by noting that the appropriate comparison is not between what remittances are doing and what they could be doing – but instead what they are doing compared to what would happen if there were no remittances at all. Nyarko and Chartouni also note that remittances help in consumption after (or during) catastrophic events, providing important and often a very quick source of humanitarian assistance. Alessandro Monsutti (2012) describes remittances to Afghanistan as a strategic diversification of economic activities for Afghan households, which are "particularly effective transnational structures of cooperation".

TOTAL REMITTANCES INTO AFGHANISTAN IN USD (MILLIONS) (2012–2020)

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
219.4	347.2	253.4	348.6	622.7	822.7	803.5	828.6	788.9
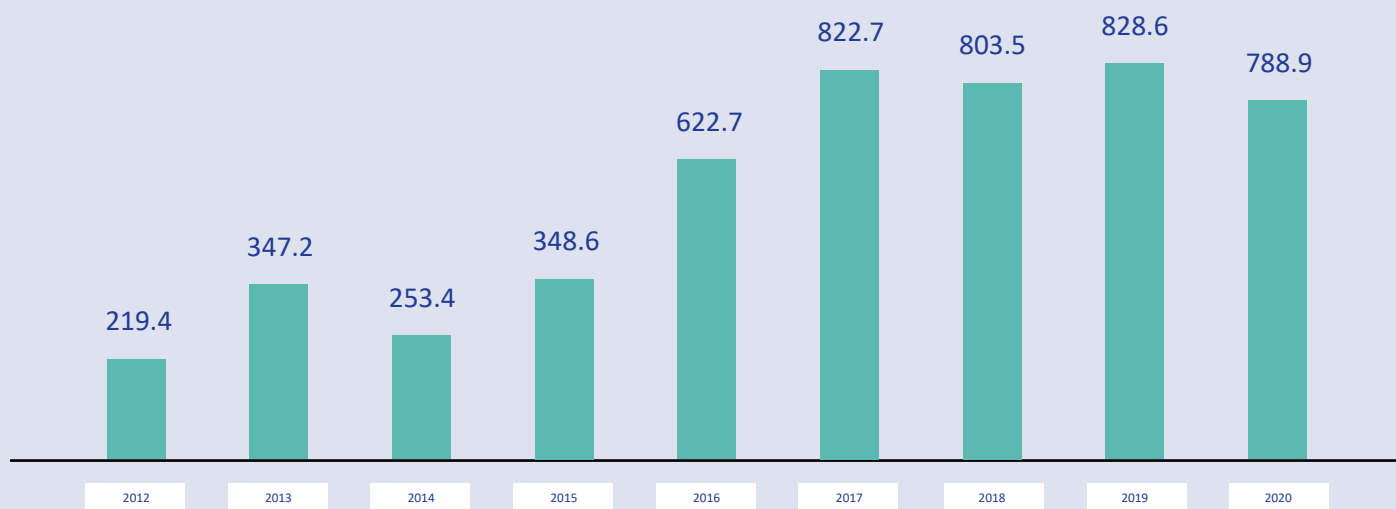
Source: IOM's GMDAC based on World Bank data. See data also on the www.migrationdataportal.org.

"He sends money through hawala."

With Western Union and MoneyGram temporarily halting services in Afghanistan and the operations of banks imperilled in the wake of the Taliban takeover, users had to find other means to get money into the country. Even upon resumption of financial services, banks have transfer and withdrawal limits amidst overall liquidity issues.

Yet those official channels had never been the most important transfer mechanism. Before the Taliban regained authority in Afghanistan, only 15 per cent of Afghans had bank accounts and even fewer used their bank accounts regularly (Demirguc-Kunt et al., 2018). Access to formal finance was also already highly gendered: only 7 per cent of women across the entire country had access. While the formal banking system had been expanding in Afghanistan prior to the Taliban's takeover, the informal sector and hawala system still dominated. The hawala system is an informal method of transferring money, including across borders, through a network of money brokers referred to as "hawaladers". Some estimates suggested that 90 per cent of Afghanistan's financial transactions ran through hawala, with over 900 providers operating across the country.

A few hours' drive from Zeenat's village, on the outskirts of a major city recently overtaken by the Taliban, Sana's husband in the Islamic Republic of Iran too had been sending remittances through the hawala system. "He sends money through hawala," Sana explained, referring to her husband. "My brother-in-law or father-in-law collects the money from the city centre. I give them a list of items that I need at home, they purchase them, and give me the remaining money." The hawaladers use their personal networks, based on trust, to transfer value between countries, charging commission and adjusting exchange rates to make money. Before the Taliban takeover, the hawala system occupied a grey zone in Afghanistan – not entirely licit nor illicit. Hawala has been linked to crime, money laundering and terrorism financing in Afghanistan and globally (Hakimi, 2015), but it is also crucial in remittances and money transfers where Afghans would not otherwise be able to access financial services. An Afghan returnee explained in a separate Samuel Hall and Alliance for Financial Inclusion (2020) study focused on the financial inclusion of displaced persons:

> *Hawaladars have many offices in all the provinces, and also internationally. You can find hawala brokers in all the bazaars. Most remittances from migrants are transferred to Afghanistan this way, especially for the migrants who don't have official documents to access banks or other transfer agents.*

The use of informal channels to send remittances were impacted in many countries across Asia as pandemic-related restrictions meant informal, hawala-type money transfers were much less accessible or available as a channel to financial consumers and these restrictions pushed previously informal transfers toward more formal or digital channels. It remains to be seen, however, how the Taliban takeover will impact these channels.

Uncertainty surrounding remittances

Hawala underpinned the livelihood strategies of so many Afghans reliant on income from abroad. By its inherent nature, it is difficult to enforce network compliance with regulatory obligations. Indeed, most hawala transfers pass under the radar since no records of transactions are kept, with Skype, Viber or WhatsApp messages usually destroyed upon completion of transactions. For this reason, its use was discouraged by the Western-backed government. While it seems unlikely that the Taliban would try to shut down the all-important system, it seems likely that they will aim to exert greater oversight and may seek to extract taxes from it. But it is unclear whether the hawala system, which still relies on hard currency, can continue to function properly amidst the wider economic crunch. The lack of cash means hawaladers may not be able to disburse funds as they did previously, in a similar fashion to cash-strapped formal banks. Those Afghans who do manage to leave the country may face difficulties finding work, while those left behind may face difficulties withdrawing funds sent their way.

This is (more) grave news in light of pressing humanitarian needs and drought-like conditions across much of the country. The United Nations warns Afghanistan could soon start to run out of food. As the need for remittances increased, the COVID-19 pandemic had already greatly reduced their frequency and amount. In a rapid survey on the impacts of COVID-19 by Samuel Hall (2020), three quarters of the interviewed households receiving remittances had reported that this vital source of finance had dwindled as potential senders abroad were struggling themselves.

Zeenat's husband was not able to send money for three months from Saudi Arabia during their lockdown, leading Zeenat to borrow money from a family member until her husband resumed work – and resumed sending remittances.

Working through uncertainty: Policy priorities

In the face of the uncertainties facing remittances, and considering their importance to so many Afghan families and the overall economy, multiple policy options are available.

There is a need for better data and knowledge regarding Afghan remittances. Though they are vital for many Afghans, major aspects of remittances into the country are not fully understood. This includes data on remittance flow volumes, remittance corridors, remittance costs, average transaction size and channels utilized. Monitoring the Taliban's approach to hawala, mobile money and other financial services will also be critical, along with tactical engagement regarding remittances and the financial sector overall. There is a need for data on the importance and uses of remittances as the situation in Afghanistan evolves, including the changing economic situation, the unfolding humanitarian crisis, the impacts of COVID-19 and any other issues preventing influencing remittance flows and utilization.

There was already a lack of disaggregated data on remittances and financial services before the Taliban takeover of the country. Now, a better understanding of how Afghans can safely and sustainably access basic financial services such as savings and remittance transfers is even more pressing. What is the role of digitization during this time of turbulence? What are the main barriers to financial services such as remittances, and how might they be overcome – whether it is for formal financial services or the widely used hawala system.

Finally, more research on remittance senders is also required. How will the outflow of refugees to neighbouring countries, and further afield, affect those Afghans who are already abroad and the funds they can send home? What is the size of the Afghan diaspora residing abroad and its willingness to engage in livelihood and humanitarian support to families in Afghanistan? If the scarcity of available cash continues, what could be the impact on cross-border mobility?

Policymakers can also support the Afghan diaspora and remittance senders who are abroad, coordinating and calibrating responses. The Afghan diaspora have been playing an essential role in supporting relatives and networks in Afghanistan for decades. In work with Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination in 2018, Samuel Hall analysed the role diaspora organizations play in contributing to emergency responses in crisis settings (Samuel Hall and Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination, 2018). How the Afghan diaspora continue to support their families in need back in Afghanistan, and how organizations can reinforce this support, will be a vital area of work moving forward.

There is a need to include remittances in migration and humanitarian policies and programming. United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations have previously worked with mobile money platforms in Afghanistan to distribute cash quickly and securely. Connected to the policy option of working with diaspora, policymakers can work to ensure that Afghan families can access remittances safely and securely. Afghans have also previously been able to use IOM and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees documents to access low-risk, low-balance financial accounts and mobile money services. It is not clear at this point how the arrival of the Taliban will impact fragile gains in the use of formal and digital channels; indeed, some experts suspect that cash and informal channels may take on more importance in light of regulatory issues associated with the new regime. Adapting to the new circumstances, supporting Afghan families to send and receive money will be crucial during the unfolding economic troubles – with financial strains related to housing, food and fuel already apparent. Many Afghans will need to be able to access humanitarian support and affordable financial services, including savings and remittances, to avoid predatory loans and negative coping strategies.

For Zeenat, her husband in Saudi Arabia and her family, along with millions of others, what comes next for remittances is an essential question during Afghanistan's swirling uncertainty. ■

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A diaspora in flux: Changing dynamics of Afghans abroad and the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

Martin Wolf Anderson[1]

With the Taliban gaining control of Afghanistan in mid-August 2021 and amid rapidly growing humanitarian needs, predictions and analyses of new potential large-scale outmigration and consequences for the Afghan civilian population were – and remain – ample.[2] One area that has received less attention, however, is what this situation will mean for the close to 6 million Afghans living in the diaspora[3] and their engagement in Afghanistan (Ross and Barratt, 2021). The Afghan diaspora has long been involved in a broad range of economic, social and political activities in relation to their former home country. In light of recent events, the scale, focus and dynamics of diaspora engagement is likely to be about to change.

Tracing past Afghan diaspora engagement with their country of origin

Large-scale migration has followed significant events in Afghanistan related to change in leadership, instability, insecurity and emergencies. Linked to this are circumstances around when and why diaspora members left Afghanistan and how these have shaped their motivations, ambitions and ways of organizing, establishing networks and forming alliances. During the Soviet occupation (1979–1989), an estimated 40 per cent of the population left Afghanistan mainly to India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan and Türkiye, the Gulf States, Europe and North America. In the period leading to 2001, where Afghanistan was first controlled by the Afghan central government led by the Mujahideen and then by the Taliban, outmigration and returns fluctuated depending on regional contexts (Danish Refugee Council (DRC), forthcoming (a); Garrote-Sanchez, 2017; Willner-Reid, 2017). Following events on 11 September 2001 in the United States and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by the United States and coalition forces to combat terrorism and instate a civilian government, an estimated 1.8 million Afghans returned to Afghanistan in 2002. However, the period that followed saw increased instability, insecurity and negative socioeconomic developments that worsened as most allied North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces withdrew in 2014, leading to further outmigration that coincided with the European refugee crisis in 2015 (DRC, 2019 and forthcoming (a)).

In broad terms, Afghan diaspora activities have included keeping cultural practices alive and organizing peer support on finding their ways in new countries of residence, providing direct support to communities in Afghanistan by remitting money back regularly or by fundraising for relief activities. It has also to some extent been about getting involved in advocacy for protecting the rights of Afghans back home, those on the move or for those that have been resettled in a third country. Others again have become active in politics in their former home country, invested in businesses, set up charities or non-governmental organizations and have arguably played a substantial role in peace processes. Several former high-level Afghan politicians were members of the diaspora, including Ashraf Ghani, a United States citizen with an extensive career in academia and with the World Bank, as well as Hamid Karzai, Afghanistan's first post-Taliban president, who also spent a considerable amount of time in Pakistan. Furthermore, there has been a high degree of generational division in the diaspora that challenges cohesion and common approaches in outreach and advocacy (DRC, 2019 and forthcoming (a)).[4]

While the activities and dynamics of the Afghan diaspora in Europe and elsewhere have been documented to some extent, less seems to be understood of the impact and footprint of Afghan diaspora activities in Afghanistan.[5] From the research and work of DRC, it has been evident that many diaspora organizations pre-Taliban takeover had shown a desire to be active in Afghanistan but felt limited by safety concerns. There has been some reluctance from the diaspora to work with the Government of Afghanistan, and a lack of awareness about its development policies (DRC, 2019 and forthcoming (a)).

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[1] Martin Wolf Anderson is the Project Coordinator for Diaspora Programme at the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).

[2] See, for instance, Sayed et al., 2021; Ritter and Guzel, 2021; and Emmott, 2021.

[3] DRC defines diaspora as migrants and refugees and their descendants who maintain active ties with their former or ancestral homeland and with compatriots living elsewhere. As such, diasporas are an integral part of civil society in both their countries of origin and residence.

[4] A political crisis due to a lack of will to share responsibilities to protect refugees arriving to the European Union (DRC, 2020).

[5] Reference is made to the diaspora impact report for Afghanistan by DRC (2021a), which includes a literature review of past efforts to understand the diaspora impact and footprint in Afghanistan.

A new page is turned for the Afghan diaspora: Taliban taking over and what that may mean for Afghans abroad

During the first 14 days after the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021, upwards of 120,000 Afghans were evacuated out of Afghanistan by more than 20 governments and a range of other actors (Ferris, 2021; Reuters, 2021). While the majority of those are now trying to establish whether they can and want to stay in their hastily decided new country of residence, they form part of a potentially new large group of Afghans leaving their country. These Afghans will become part of the diaspora and while the size, geographic dispersion and composition are still to be seen, this group can reasonably be expected to include a significant number of individuals with relevant skill sets and a strong interest in becoming vocal diaspora actors. They may include human rights activists, opposition leaders and other highly skilled individuals that have the potential to infuse new energy into the Afghan diaspora as a whole and renew its internal dynamics and ways of engaging. These factors together do bode for a potentially transformational period for the Afghan diaspora.

How will these potentially transformational changes unfold? It is reasonable to assume that at least two phases will occur: (a) a first phase in the immediate aftermath of 15 August 2021, where the diaspora will be in somewhat of a scramble to identify key priorities and diaspora leadership while also getting a grasp of what new realities will look like in Afghanistan; and (b) a second phase where diaspora roles and priorities are becoming clearer given the emerging developments on a new daily life in Afghanistan under the Taliban rule.[6]

Since 15 August 2021, there have been indications of an Afghan diaspora that went from getting relatively little attention internationally and in their countries of residence, to becoming vocal and taking part in international advocacy. Initial indications show that diaspora actions thus far have mainly focused on organizing rallies, online advocacy and forming alliances. Thematically, there has been a significant focus on calling for the protection of Afghan refugees and evacuees that have worked with coalition forces (both on military and civilian assignments), on fundraising, and working to provide direct assistance to communities in Afghanistan despite issues with transferring funds to Afghanistan. Online advocacy topics have remained varied, however, where competing narratives of varying support and opposition to the former and current leadership have been aired – from both diaspora actors and those residing in Afghanistan. Examples of concrete issues gaining traction online include sharing widely hashtags such as #SanctionPakistan and "Don't abandon Afghanistan" and highly debated posts and articles by diaspora actors discussing women and girls' rights, the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Türkiye, and mobilizing governments in countries where the diaspora resides to take action in support of those back home affected by conflict and displacement (DRC, forthcoming (b)).

An issue that has significant consequences for communities and households in Afghanistan relates to uncertainties about the flow of funds transferred regularly from Afghans living abroad to Afghanistan. Remittances sent from diaspora abroad constitute a lifeline for many in Afghanistan and inflows in 2015 were estimated at 1.7 per cent of GDP, while analysis that includes informal channels ups this tenfold to 16 per cent of GDP (Garrote-Sanchez, 2017). Amidst an already dire financial situation, we saw there has been an international aid system, donors and other actions pause to reconsider their engagement in Afghanistan. Initially, in August 2021, the banking system and international transfers came to an abrupt halt; although Western Union has subsequently resumed in operations, and many Afghans have succeeded in transferring money via the hawala system. Nonetheless, the financial sector remains poised on the brink of collapse due to continuous withdrawals of cash from Afghan citizens since 15 August 2021 (Vaswani, 2021). With a renewed wish to engage and despite challenges with funds transfers, a significant increase in diaspora remittances and emergency funds going to Afghanistan may very well be on its way (DRC, forthcoming (b)).[7, 8]

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[6] To document and explore the first ongoing phase, DRC is currently undertaking a real-time review of the initial 45 days following 15 August 2021. The aim of the review is to shed light on actions diaspora organizations engage in, the changing diaspora dynamics and immediate outcomes of actions taken. The real-time review is slated to be finalized by end of October 2021 and is carried out by Meraki Labs for the Diaspora Programme of DRC and the Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination (DEMAC) platform (DRC, 2021b). A review covering the second phase during 2022 is in the planning stage to follow the development of how and what the Afghan diaspora will engage in. This is likely going to revolve around diaspora advocacy and direct support to Afghanistan and how programming may support this constructively.

[7] Online fundraising campaigns seems to have become increasing popular. A search on the online fundraising platform GoFundMe found 150 campaigns with "Afghan" in them in September 2021 (excluding those focusing on personal issues). More examples and details will be available in the forthcoming real-time review of Afghan diaspora engagement of DRC in the immediate period following 15 August 2021.

[8] The issue of potential consequences of declining remittance flows and the current economic situation is outlined well in a recent blog post titled "Remittances to Afghanistan are lifelines: They are needed more than ever in a time of crisis" by Ross and Barratt (2021).

Supporting constructive engagement of the Afghan diaspora now and in the period to come

It has now been established that the Afghan diaspora has renewed aspirations and motivation to support the protection of rights of Afghans and provide aid to communities in Afghanistan. The question then is where this leaves the international aid and development community, donors and researchers, in terms of supporting engagement coming from the diaspora. From direct engagement of DRC across over 10 years with diaspora actors from fragile contexts, the key is to:

(a) Focus on constructive diaspora engagement, recognize their significance and find strengths in their diversity;

(b) Invest in diaspora relationships to know their strengths and weaknesses in issue or areas of potential collaboration;

(c) Explore concrete and mutually beneficial programming that is built around the principles of inclusion, equality in partnerships and non-instrumentalization in a way that respects the ambitions of both diaspora actors and partners.[9]

Concretely and in line with the above, DRC will work on three main issues with the Afghan diaspora in the period to come: supporting diaspora capacity to engage in advocacy activities, direct support to communities in Afghanistan, and working to gain better insight into how the complex ways the diaspora operates. This includes helping them to get organized and participate in discussions on the future of Afghanistan and play a strong role for Afghan refugees, including in supporting and sharing protection information to people on the move and those who have resettled. This is done with an overall aim to strengthen the voice and agency of diaspora actors in support of those that have been affected by displacement and conflict. We invite you to join us! ■

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[9] In-depth insights into improving diaspora coordination in emergencies is available via the DEMAC platform hosted by DRC, a global initiative aiming at enhancing mutual knowledge and coordination, communication and coherence between diaspora humanitarian actors and the institutional humanitarian system (see www.demac.org).

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Return to Afghanistan: The perils of returning to unstable and insecure countries

Constanza Vera-Larrucea and Henrik Malm Lindberg[1]

The current situation in Afghanistan illustrates how political developments in conflict-torn countries can rapidly change the need for protection. The present situation is likely to generate large refugee flows. The authors' recent report Those Who Were Sent Back (Vera-Larrucea et al., 2021) explored the situation of those who did not obtain asylum in Sweden and were returned to Iraq and Afghanistan. This last group was living under especially harsh circumstances after arrival and with low prospects of reintegration. With the Taliban back in power, many returnees have become even more vulnerable, making reintegration in a context of conflict, pandemic and poverty less likely. Such a situation questions the effectiveness of pre-existent reintegration support available for those sent to areas of a country deemed as safe. A country with "safe zones" might potentially become a high-risk country. For most returnees, remigration represents the only gleaming light in an otherwise very dark tunnel, which calls into question the effectiveness of the existing reintegration support, as well as the whole concept of "sustainable return", particularly to contexts of such political instability as that of Afghanistan. Return to such settings calls for reconfiguring the rationality and support offered to returnees.

States have the legitimate right to decide who shall stay inside their borders. Still, several aspects need to be considered when sending back rejected asylum seekers to unstable countries. Sweden, traditionally a generous country to asylum seekers, became more restrictive after the reception system collapsed during the 2015 refugee crisis. Although a high number of Syrians received a high rate of protection, Afghan citizens in Sweden had a lower protection rate than in other European countries (Parusel and Schneider, 2017). The voluntary and forced removal of unsuccessful asylum seekers to zones considered as safe in Afghanistan generated substantial media coverage and attention among civil society organizations and public opinion. Afghanistan has been a conflict-torn country for decades, yet it has been considered safe enough for returns, at least to particular zones in or parts of the country. The current situation, with the Taliban retaking power and many Afghans fleeing the country, highlights the potential perils of return and reintegration to contexts that are considered (at least partially) safe, yet at the same time on the brink of chaos and conflict. What happens after return, and what can we learn from the returnees' experiences?

A recent Migration Studies Delegation (Delmi) report[2] – funded by the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund – analyses the experiences of individuals who sought asylum in Sweden during the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 but were rejected and then returned, voluntarily or by force, to Afghanistan or Iraq. The report shows that a large majority of the returnees find themselves living in miserable conditions, being unable to achieve what States and international organizations call a "sustainable return". At the time of their return, the situation in Afghanistan was such that it posed considerable challenges for returnees to reintegrate. While the report was published prior to the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan during the summer of 2021, the current situation in the country adds new dimensions to their stories, particularly in relation to the instability to which they returned and which they often feared before returning.

Even before the returnees left Sweden, certain aspects of the asylum process appear to later influence the return and reintegration. Volition seems to be important for the return to become successful. The Swedish authorities involved in the process of return agree that a voluntary return is preferable over a forced return since it is considered more efficient and humane. However, when turning to returnees' perspectives, the "degree" of voluntariness differs significantly. Some described feeling coerced into agreeing to a voluntary return, a phenomenon that has been called "soft deportation" (Leerkes et al., 2017; van Houte et al., 2021). The voluntariness of return – something that authorities like to emphasize as an important building block for reintegration – is in most cases felt partially limited. Its intended positive impact on reintegration is therefore questioned by the data in this report.

Many of those receiving a return notice are unwilling to cooperate as a previous report by Delmi (Malm Lindberg, 2020) showed. Individuals often refuse to make themselves available for the the authorities and

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instead opt for a life in hiding, as irregular migrants with very limited access to work or welfare. The report shows that such choices may well be rational considering the migrants' knowledge of the harsh reality that many face after returning from Sweden. The difficulties to reintegrate in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq not only point to the costs of an unsuccessful migration experience, but also to the many security problems posed by ethno-sectarian violence, high unemployment and widespread corruption. The current situation in Afghanistan shows that fears among Afghan returnees prior to return were often warranted and based on the experience of already ongoing conflicts.

Even before the withdrawal of the American troops, Afghanistan was considered an unstable country with one of the most fragile economies in the world, where 80 per cent of the population lived under the poverty line. The situation for those in the study that returned to Afghanistan, often young men, was – for the most part – already very difficult when the interviews took place. In all return cases, individuals were returning to Kabul, a city that was not only considered unsafe but also unknown to most returnees. In addition to feeling unsafe and lost upon return, many lacked social networks and access to any form of informal support structures. Some had more roots and social networks in the Islamic Republic of Iran, since they had previously migrated there seeking safety and better living conditions. Many faced everyday discrimination upon return, leading to difficulties in finding work and making themselves at home. In contrast, those who returned to Iraq fared comparatively better likely because they were older, had more social connections in their country of nationality and were overall more established before migrating to Sweden.

In both cases, returnees found themselves in a worse economic situation than when they left the country. They also suffered from insecurity and often described living under a personal threat, which complicated their psychosocial reintegration. For the few returnees who seem to have become somewhat reintegrated, two things stand out: family and social networks. Social networks facilitate economic reintegration as it provides opportunities to find work, start a business or some form of support in times of crisis.

Interestingly, for neither of the groups of returnees, the experiences, knowledge and skills gained during the time in Sweden seem to contribute towards reintegration. The types of academic, practical or vocational training received in Sweden proved difficult to make use of in contexts such as Afghanistan or Iraq.

Besides, the long waiting time during the asylum process and the perceived unfair assessment of their cases by the authorities contribute to feelings of despair and seem to have had a negative effect on their mental health. This in turn poses implications for their ability to reintegrate. The economic reintegration support available provides only temporary relief during the first phase after arrival. This support, however, is perceived as difficult to access and seldom used for education, starting a business or some activity leading to self-sufficiency. Returnees are, therefore, not well equipped to return. Besides, access to this economic support is perceived as a lengthy and troublesome process.

Added to the economic difficulties upon return is the stigma associated with returning. This is not a new finding, and has been previously documented for specific groups and for the specific case of Afghans (Schuster and Majidi, 2013). Many returnees noted that for someone to return, they must have committed some sort of criminal offence resulting in deportation. If one, according to this reasoning, has chosen to return from what is perceived as an immensely better life in Europe, then that person is probably loaded with money. As such, many do not disclose being a returnee for fear of harassment and for being robbed. An even more serious aspect associated with the stigma of return is the belief that returnees could be contaminated with Western ideas and values, which would undermine the Islamic faith and generate mistrust among people. Under a dogmatic Taliban rule, the mistrust towards those who have been living for three to five years in Europe may well increase. This makes the position of returnees even more vulnerable and at risk of Taliban retaliation.

The difficulties in getting a foothold in their country of nationality – not always the country that the returnee would call home – result in the large majority considering remigration. Even before the rise of the Taliban, many Afghans planned to someday remigrate to Sweden or to some other European country. Some of the returnees in the study were still in contact with Swedes who would send them money and who, at the moment of the interviews, were trying to find ways to help the returnees remigrate to Sweden legally.

It is clear from the report that the assumption that return is the final step of a migration cycle needs to be questioned. This holds true particularly when the country of return is unstable, at the brink of conflict and not deemed completely safe.

When there is low willingness to return and low understanding of the legal implications of the asylum process, the likelihood of remigration is high. If the conditions upon return leave little to no hope for a better future, returnees will plan to migrate again. Return will not always be the end of the journey followed by reintegration. Return policies and reintegration programmes must be extra sensitive and finely tuned when dealing with returns involving such vulnerabilities. Every State has the power to decide who will be allowed to stay within its borders. However, as the study has shown, not all returns are the same. The zones deemed safe enough for people to return and reintegrate might well disappear in a country with a fragile political system, unemployment and endemic poverty. Returning to these areas demands more appropriate tools and broad support for returnees, who face the stigma of return and as the Afghan case illustrates, become a negative precedent for any form of reintegration. Individuals must be better equipped to endure the hardness of the new context, to which they are sent on the grounds of their nationality.

It is concluded that returns to a country considered unstable but having "safe zones" have little odds of being sustainable. It will probably not be the end of the migration cycle, and it demands a different approach in terms of support for the returnee. Considering the current situation in Afghanistan, three of the Delmi report's policy recommendations seem particularly pertinent to highlight:

Make reintegration programmes individualized and easy to access. When returning to an unstable region, it is important that individuals can count on the necessary skills to be self-sufficient, even in hostile contexts. Besides financial aid, counselling and help with acquiring the necessary social networks should be considered as part of the support package, as it will contribute towards reintegration. These networks may also ensure that if the conditions change, there will be someone to turn to in case of extreme need.

Reconsider the terminology within return migration, particularly pertaining to sustainability. The current policies of return consider it as the final step in the migration cycle. However, this is far from the intention of the respondents. Most Afghan returnees in the Delmi report noted that they would try to remigrate as soon as possible to Sweden or to another European country. The

respondents, most of them of Hazara origin – a persecuted minority – feared the Taliban due to previous harassment; indeed, some of them had already been displaced to the Islamic Republic of Iran before migrating to Sweden. They manifested a strong intention to migrate to Sweden or another European country. Considering the current situation, it is not surprising that hundreds of thousands of Afghans are trying to flee the country. Return to an unsafe and unstable country is simply notsustainable in the eyes of returnees.

Possibilities for legal pathways for a temporary stay in Sweden. Many of the Afghan returnees were making specific plans to return to Sweden at the time for the interviews. Those who were better integrated in Swedish society had forged strong and close relationships with family, friends and employers who assisted them even after returning. Some receive financial aid from their acquaintances in Sweden who were also willing to help them to legally remigrate. The situation in Afghanistan has changed dramatically in a short period of time, and this group seems bent on trying to remigrate to Sweden one way or another. The situation makes it difficult to legally migrate as the evacuation has been chaotic and the borders are not as permeable as before. Therefore, legal pathways for those who already find themselves en route and have connections and skills that could allow them to succeed in Swedish society should be considered.

Finally, it is important to note that enforcement decisions regarding deportations to Afghanistan should not currently take place due to the security situation in Afghanistan at the time of writing. In August 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees shared a non-return advisory, which called for a bar on forced returns of Afghan nationals, including asylum seekers who have had their claims rejected. Since then, the Swedish Migration Agency halted returns to Afghanistan and introduced the possibility to reassess the need for protection to individuals with a pending return decision.

The recommendations here are based on the Delmi report that was finalized early in 2021.■

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The time is now: Moving towards a coherent multilevel approach to protect Afghans[1]

Johanna C. Günther, Raphaela Schweiger and Janina Stürner-Siovitz[2]

This article highlights the need for coherent, human rights-centred policies for the treatment of Afghan refugees. It offers recommendations addressed to decision makers at five levels of governance: (a) international level; (b) European Union; (c) Government of Germany; (d) the German Länder; and (e) local authorities. For each level, three key recommendations will be introduced that leverage the particular strengths and scope of action of specific actors, while at the same time stressing the potential for multilevel cooperation.

Introduction

In the summer of 2021, the world watched in horror as the Taliban rapidly took over Afghanistan. Greatly underestimated by many, the capture of Kabul caused consternation on the part of the international community – even more so: complete helplessness. By 31 August, the United States of America had withdrawn its troops, and so had its allies. The chaotic evacuation of Afghan nationals who had for years provided essential support to various armies and, moreover, to German ministries and civil society organizations, ultimately became emblematic of the West's failure in Afghanistan.

The coming weeks and months will bring a multitude of questions for decision makers on different levels of governance to answer. It remains to be seen whether the Global Compact on Refugees managed to breathe new life into the now 70-years-old 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (also known as the Geneva Convention on Refugees). We will witness whether the European Union is relying on the fact that routes taken by refugees to reach Europe are becoming increasingly more dangerous and thus less attractive, or if the European Union member States will finally succeed in establishing effective, resource-based humanitarian cooperation between European Union member States and host countries.

In the face of general concern, helplessness and incoherent policy approaches, this article highlights the need for coherent, human rights-centred policies on the treatment of Afghan refugees. It offers recommendations addressed to decision makers at five different levels of governance: (a) international level; (b) European Union; (c) Government of Germany; (d) German Länder; and (e) local authorities. For each level, three key recommendations will be introduced that leverage both the strengths and scope of action of the actors operating at that level, while at the same time stressing the potential for multilevel cooperation.

The international level

Supporting Afghans is a responsibility and duty of the greatest urgency and importance for the entire international community. There are several obvious measures that need to be taken in the short term, such as stepping up humanitarian aid, both in quality and quantity in the wider region, and enhancing diplomatic efforts, to allow for continuation of work of humanitarian workers as well as achieve political solutions. It is argued that the current situation should be seized as an opportunity to strengthen the level of protection frameworks.

Using the Global Compact on Refugees as a blueprint

At the global level, the Global Compact on Refugees with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework serves as a guide and toolkit for ensuring the rights of Afghan refugees enshrined in the Geneva Convention on Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and for the support of host countries. The Pact offers concrete approaches to the international division of responsibilities and formulates the desire of reaching a more predictable and comprehensive response to crises. It also intends to prevent refugees from becoming stuck in protracted situations without solutions. One of three support mechanisms of the Pact is the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. Approaches to helping Afghan refugees in the region should build on the experiences made with this mechanism – or the mechanism itself – which is internationally recognized.

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Securing digital identities

National digital ID platforms are being used by a growing number of countries and increasingly play a role in the governance of migration and refugee movements (Bither and Ziebarth, 2020). In Afghanistan, however, there is now a risk that digital IDs and data, which are based on biometric identifiers or identifiers linked to services or online profiles, could be used to identify and locate certain people by the Taliban in a targeted manner, leading many to erase their digital "trails". For example, media reports showed that United States biometric devices are now in the hands of the Taliban and could be used to target Afghans who helped coalition forces (Hills, 2021; Bajak, 2021).

For the international community, this means that guarantees for data protection and transparency in the storage of highly sensitive personal data, including biometric data, must be ensured through international agreements and legislation, including by the European Union, and respected by host countries, humanitarian actors and municipalities. High-security platforms for personal data for refugees, migrants and other vulnerable groups should be expanded and made available to these groups.

Protecting the rights of and ensuring integration opportunities for refugees

The rights and access of refugees to health, housing, education and the labour market must be protected and ensured. If these rights are denied, people find themselves in a "limbo" for years and sometimes decades, making them dependent on State or international aid. The international community must work to ensure that refugees are able to secure their livelihoods both in initial host States in the region and in European States, and that they are integrated into their destination countries and supported in achieving self-reliance and resilience. Both unilateral and multilateral aid to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, which are likely to, once again, become the main host States, must be strictly conditional on the protection of human rights in these countries. Furthermore, access to safe, regular and durable pathways for forced migrants such as resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes should be improved.

The European level

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan could become a key moment in the debate on the urgently needed reform of the European asylum policy to create a coherent, harmonized human rights-compliant system.

Implementing effective emergency response measures

The European Commission's Draft Action Plan responding to the events in Afghanistan (Council of the European Union, 2021a) should be taken further: the European Union High-Level Resettlement Forum in October 2021 has only partly succeeded in bringing together European Union member States to commit to an expanded emergency programme for the reception of Afghan refugees. The Commission must step up to the task of both engaging in a global response to the situation in Afghanistan and coordinating member States' efforts to set up a short-term humanitarian admission's programme for evacuating Afghans that have already been identified to be at risk. It is also important that such a programme avoid separating families. Furthermore, resettlement must be significantly improved both in quantitative as well as qualitative terms. In this regard, resettlement should be designed in a way that prioritizes transparency, accessibility and speed. In the meantime, the pledged package of EUR 300 million in humanitarian aid for 2021 must be augmented for 2022, and the Humanitarian Air Bridge continued.

Transforming the emergency resettlement programme into a long-term strategy

The first European Union resettlement programme was launched in July 2015. By December 2019, 65,000 persons were resettled to European Union member States. Upon request of the European Commission, member States committed to offering more than 30,000 additional resettlement places in 2020. Now is the time for European Union member States to step up again and comply with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' request to grant an additional 42,500 resettlement places for Afghans within the next five years.

At the time of writing, the Commission's aspirations to implement a long-term European Union resettlement framework have so far been unsuccessful despite the Commission's legislative proposal launched in July 2016. Yet, now more than ever, it is crucial for the European Union to transform its emergency resettlement programme into a joint long-term resettlement strategy. The Commission on the Root Causes of Displacement appointed by the Government of Germany has made detailed proposals in this regard, which can be coordinated across the European Union as well as internationally.

Improving the Common European Asylum System

The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) is in crisis. This flawed system is jeopardizing the cohesion of the entire community and casting doubt on the central task of the European asylum policy – ensuring international protection to persons facing persecution. European Union legislators should take the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and the region as an impetus for relaunching efforts to harmonize CEAS and increase its efficiency. Several weeks after the takeover by the Taliban, it is already observed that European Union member States are taking diverging paths in their treatment of Afghan refugees: while Greece is bolstering its border fortifications and Austria is largely refusing to accept Afghan refugees, other member States are trying to find national solutions. CEAS is thus coming under renewed pressure. However, this renewed urgency can also be a window of opportunity for rekindling the political dialogue in Brussels; Member States would do well to seize this opportunity.

The German federal level

Germany has shown in the past that it is capable – with great effort – of prioritizing humanitarian considerations and focusing on saving human lives. Germany needs to live up to its international legal, humanitarian and political responsibilities, and support and protect Afghans. In this context, it is crucial to establish a coherent approach in aiding Afghan local staff, which must be coordinated between all relevant ministries, as well as expanding German resettlement quotas and incorporating integration policy measures into all policy approaches.

Creating pathways for Afghan locals employed by German organizations

The Federal Government of Germany must agree on a coherent, coordinated approach on how to create immigration pathways and integrate Afghan locals who were employed to support German organizations in Afghanistan. This should include the granting of prima facie status to Afghan refugees, the accelerated admission of local staff and extensions of residence permits for Afghans already living in the country. The Federal Government should simplify bureaucratic requirements to admit local staff and offer reception for the entire family of staff members (regardless of age), as well as persons who have worked for German non-governmental organizations. For this purpose, German visas for family reunification must be issued non-bureaucratically in the neighbouring countries.

Increasing resettlement quotas and offering long-term residency

The Federal Government should significantly increase its quota of resettlement places for 2021 and 2022 for Afghans in need of protection. This increase in resettlement quotas should continue in the coming years. To optimally link resettlement and local integration, the Federal Government could work with municipalities interested in implementing a matching process between refugees and cities (see below). Private sponsoring programmes, like Neustart im Team (NeST) should be expanded and consolidated by the Federal Government through the provision of funding and linked to European and international efforts brought together under the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI, n.d.).

Prioritizing integration

The Federal Government should not only evaluate its funding programmes in terms of actual practical needs but should actively encourage the Länder to develop a coherent, dynamic integration policy. However, "integration can only succeed if sufficient resources are made available" (Günther et al., 2021), and if the ways in which resources are provided are adapted to practical needs. An active integration policy includes political will and the provision of resources, as well as enabling and strengthening civil society initiatives and organizations, local authorities, the private sector and individuals in engaging in integration.

The level of German Länder

Finally, regional and local authorities can make decisive contributions to the local implementation of the previous recommendations. Involving local and regional decision makers in the planning of national, European and international protection strategies for Afghan refugees increases both the chances of politically coherent multilevel implementation and greater support of the local population. In addition, the German Länder have considerable scope of action of their own that can be leveraged to prepare for the protection and reception of Afghan refugees. In this regard, they should take the following steps:

Establishing regional humanitarian admission programmes for Afghans

Several German Länder, among them Berlin, Thuringia and Schleswig-Holstein, have announced their intention to open humanitarian admission programmes for Afghan refugees. Other regional governments should follow their example, concretize their announcements in the short term and agree with the Government on concrete collaboration for implementation.

Offering legal pathways to students, academics and activists

The Länder should support German universities in providing study places for Afghan refugees, if possible, within the framework of a nationwide university network. Furthermore, scholarship and fellowship programmes for academics at risk, including those tailored to the protection of human rights and women's rights activists, should be expanded quickly and non-bureaucratically to provide scholars and activists fleeing the country with protection as well as opportunities to continue their work.

Launching matching programmes to strengthen sustainable integration

Algorithm-based procedures to match refugees and municipalities organized at the level of the Länder can improve refugee distribution along needs- and resource-oriented criteria. This would establish participatory distribution as a first step of the integration process, enable municipalities to actively seize the potentials of human mobility for local development and may contribute to reducing secondary migration. Respective pilot projects are currently being developed by academic

institutes in different countries, among them the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nuremberg and the University of Hildesheim in Germany.

The level of local authorities

Throughout the last weeks, local authorities around the world have been demonstrating their readiness to host those fleeing Afghanistan and have called for humanitarian channels and reception. At the international level, the Mayors Migration Council (MMC) has published policy recommendations for States and cities, which have by now been signed by over 70 cities worldwide (MMC, n.d.a). In the European Union, the city network Eurocities (2021) has collected a wide range of city statements. Building on these commitments, local authorities should focus on the following:

Initiating/deepening local–national dialogues

National and European city networks should use the political momentum to agree on and publish concrete figures for their reception capacities. Building on such commitments, local authorities and their networks need to strengthen dialogues with national governments to ensure that humanitarian admission is connected to local short- and long-term integration strategies.

Cooperating with cities in neighbouring countries

In recent years, European cities have gained a wealth of experience in cooperating with cities in Africa and the Middle East. The Service Agency Communities in One World, funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, has, for instance, coordinated the initiative "Municipal Know-how for Host Communities in the Middle East", in which German municipalities work with host municipalities in Jordan, Lebanon and Türkiye on issues, such as waste and water management, education and labour market integration. In the Mediterranean region, cities from Europe, the Middle East and North Africa are working together within the framework of the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Project on inclusive integration approaches for the benefit of refugees, migrants and local populations (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, n.d.). Building on these experiences, German and European municipalities could engage in cooperation with cities in Afghanistan's neighbouring countries.

Strengthening funding for city-to-city cooperation and city-led migration governance

For municipal cooperation to be effective, it requires more than just symbolic funding. National and/or European city networks should therefore support cities in the region surrounding Afghanistan to draft project proposals and present them in a coordinated way to the Government of Germany, the European Union as well as international organizations, other national donors and philanthropic actors. Inspiration can be found in the project prospectus launched in the framework of Global Cities Fund (MMC, n.d.b). In addition, the requirements for receiving funding from the Federal Government, the European Union and international organizations should be adapted to allow direct municipal access to funding for migrant and refugee reception and integration.

Conclusion

This article has offered recommendations to decision makers at the local, regional, national, European and international levels of governance to work towards a politically coherent, human rights-centred approach for the protection of Afghan nationals inside and outside of Afghanistan. A multi-annual support scheme for Afghans including a special task force as proposed by the European Commission may hold great potential if European Union member States are committed to joining forces for the protection of Afghans while simultaneously engaging in a global response. The instruments and collaboration opportunities are there – now is the time to act. ■

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Eric Adja, Director General of the International Migrants Remittances Observatory (IMRO) and Special Adviser to the President of Benin; John **K. Bingham**, Global Coordinator of civil society activities in the United Nations High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development and the Global Forum on Migration and Development; **Ambassador Eva Åkerman Börje**, Chair of the GFMD 2013–2014; Mark Cully, Chief Economist at the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection; **António Guterres**, Secretary-General of the United Nations; **Khalid Koser**, Chair of the World Economic Forum Global Agenda Council on Migration; **Khalid Malik**, Director of the Human Development Report Office, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); Cecilia **Mamlström**, EU Commissioner for Home Affairs (2010–2014); **Ali Mansoor**, Chair of the GFMD 2012; **Andrew Middleton**, Director of Culture, Recreation and Migrant Statistics, Australian Bureau of Statistics; **Najat Maalla M'Jid**, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2008–2014); **Robert A. Mocny**, Director of the Office of Biometric Identity Management (OBIM), formerly US-VISIT, US Department of Homeland Security; **Imelda M. Nicolas**, Secretary of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), Office of the President of the Philippines; **Ignacio Packer**, Secretary-General of the Terre des Hommes International Federation; **Kelly Ryan**, Coordinator of the Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees – IGC, Geneva; **Martin Schulz**, President of the European Parliament (2012–2014); **David Smith**, Director of Economic Analysis Unit, Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection; **Sir Peter D. Sutherland**, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Migration (2006–2017); **Ambassador William Lacy Swing**, Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM); **Myria Vassiliadou**, EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, European Commission; **Catherine Wiesner,** Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, US Department of State.

An Afghan driver faces the uncertain road forward, leading to Band e-Amir in Bamyan, Afghanistan. © Samuel Hall 2013/Naeem MEER