Professional Development Course on Evidence-Based Advocacy for the Afghan Diaspora

3-7 November 2022
Copenhagen, Denmark

Organisers	Danish Refugee Council Diaspora Programme: • Adrien Bory, Project Coordinator • Maina Abbasi, Project Officer Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP): • Evan Jones, Manager • Iffat Anjum, Regional Durable Solutions Specialist Mixed Migration Centre (MMC): • Themba Lewis, Regional Head Asia and the Pacific • Abdullah Mohammadi, Regional MMC Coordinator Asia and the Pacific • Shreya Bhat, Research Officer Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies (CAPRS), University of Auckland: • Gül Inanç, Co-Founder and Co-Director
Country and No. of Participants	25 participants attended the course [9 from Germany, 3 from Denmark, 2 from Belgium, 2 from France, 2 from Netherlands, 1 from Austria, 1 from Bulgaria, 1 from Canada, 1 from Czech Republic, 1 from Italy, 1 from Sweden and 1 from the United Kingdom]
Course objectives	The course aimed to strengthen the capacity and expand the expertise of participants on advocacy processes and challenges. It provided an interdisciplinary overview of forced migration issues covering political, legal, social, and economic aspects.

Introduction

The Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP), the Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies (CAPRS), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) Diaspora Programme, and the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) jointly organised the "Professional Development Short Course on Evidence-based Advocacy for Afghan Diaspora" on 3-7 November 2022 in Copenhagen, Denmark.

The short course brought together 25 participants from the Afghan diaspora in Europe and beyond. A total of 106 applications were received for the course. The selection committee, consisting of representatives from DRC, ADSP, MMC and CAPRS, carefully evaluated the applications against a set of criteria and the objectives of the course. Male and female participants were proportionate in the course. The majority of participants were actively engaged in advocacy in support of displaced Afghans.

The short course, spanning five days, was delivered through a series of structured presentations, facilitated discussions and participatory group exercises. As a preparatory exercise in advance of the course, participants were asked to share a brief write-up explaining their existing advocacy initiatives and current approach to advocacy. Furthermore, they were asked to articulate their future advocacy goals so that these could be used as a basis of discussion during the course. This exercise helped participants to brainstorm policy issues and advocacy ideas ahead of the course and to think about how they could best utilise the learning and networking opportunities during the course.

Participants were also requested to come with a 3-minute 'elevator pitch' focusing on the following:
> -What is the problem you are addressing or would like to address?
> -How do you plan to address that problem through advocacy?
> -What do you expect from this training to help you achieve that?

Throughout the course, participants were requested to present their pitch to fellow attendees. This provided an opportunity to receive feedback on their approach from participants and resource persons.

Course Overview

Human Rights and Relevant Key Concepts

The course began with a **Refresher on Human Rights**, focusing on fundamental concepts and laws related to human rights. The session was facilitated by **Brennan Webert** (Protection Advisor, DRC). The session started with definition of key concepts of refugees, forced displacement, internal displacement, and human rights. The session also provided an overview of the following international laws and guidelines-

    i.   International Human Rights Law
    ii.   International Humanitarian Law
    iii.   The 1951 Refugee Convention
    iv.   Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

The session also included a group exercise where the participants divided into groups to identify key aspects of the four above mentioned international laws and guidelines and their implications.

Sessions related to advocacy

The **Introduction to Advocacy** session (facilitated by **Evan Jones,** Manager, ADSP) began with discussing and developing a definition of advocacy. The participants engaged in a group work to develop a definition of advocacy, and to present an explanation of their definition. The key elements of successful advocacy were discussed emphasising the importance of coordination, strategic thinking, information, communication, outreach, and mobilization. For successful advocacy, knowing the facts about the issues, stakeholders and different opinions is crucial, as well as using these facts to develop clear, concise, and direct advocacy messages. Building networks and relationships to strengthen advocacy efforts is also necessary. Using a variety of advocacy tools and tactics depending on target audience can enhance the effectiveness of an advocacy strategy. Some common tools are the media, social media, petitions, letters, emails, and other evidence-based strategies. It is critical to strategically use variety of channels to convey key messages, including meetings with government officials, press conferences, letters, petitions, rallies, and phone calls.

The session also introduced different types of advocacy activities including coalition building, networking, political lobbying, promoting legislative change, briefing media, counteracting opposition etc., with real life examples.

The "**Identity, Culture and Intercultural Dialogue**" session was facilitated by **Dr. Gül Inanç** (CAPRS). The session introduced the topics of identity and culture in the context of civil society advocacy in diaspora settings. Participants engaged in discussions on how politics of identity and intercultural dialogue can play a major role in advocacy, and how public art can be used as an effective tool during this process.

The course incorporated the key steps involved in developing advocacy strategy. Problem tree analysis is a useful tool for planning advocacy strategy by identifying the advocacy issue or problem, its root causes, and consequences. The session on **Problem Tree Analysis,** facilitated by **Iffat Anjum** (Regional Durable Solutions Specialist, ADSP), introduced the concept and use of problem and solution trees in the context of advocacy planning. The steps involved in problem tree analysis were explained in the session. The group exercise saw participants divided into four groups to work on four different advocacy issues, as identified by participants themselves:

Group 1: Institutional Discrimination against the LGBTIQ+ Community
Group 2: Ongoing Hazara Genocide and Protection of Minorities
Group 3: Access to Education for Afghan Girls
Group 4: Legal Aid for Resettlement of Afghan Refugees

For developing advocacy strategies, identifying the major stakeholders and their interest and influence in the advocacy issue is crucial. In the **Stakeholder Mapping** session**, Adrien Bory** (Project Coordinator, DRC Diaspora Programme) discussed how to identify key stakeholders, and how to map the stakeholders based on their interests and influence using a power mapping grid. In the group exercise, participants identified key stakeholders for their advocacy planning activities, and explained where each stakeholder is positioned in terms of power/influence and interest.

For most advocacy initiatives, governments, the media, UN organisations and international bodies such as the European Union are among the key stakeholders. The course included separate sessions on advocacy and engaging with these key stakeholders. The **Engaging with Government** session, facilitated by **Ida Lund** (DRC Advocacy Advisor), focused on key aspects of advocacy work with the government, challenges and lessons learnt. The session on **Advocacy with United Nations** provided an overview of UNHCR's work in Europe related to forced migration and resettlement issues. The session was delivered by **Nicolas Brass** (UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe). The key priority areas for UNHCR's work in Europe were highlighted to be:

- Safeguarding asylum space and building effective protection systems, incl. in mixed movements
- Supporting reform of the Common European Asylum System and strengthening a collective European response
- Strengthening participatory and community-based approaches
- Securing solutions for refugees and IDPs
- Preventing and resolving statelessness
- Strengthening evidence-based advocacy and external engagement

The session also discussed the operating procedure of UN organisations and how to engage them in advocacy activities.

The **Advocacy with European Union** session provided an introduction to the EU, relevant institutions within the EU and an overview of the advocacy related work conducted by these institutions. The session was facilitated by **Reshad Jalali** (Senior Policy Officer, ECRE). The policy making procedure at EU level and the EU institutions that work closely with civil society organisations were also discussed during the session. The session also provided useful and practical guidelines for diaspora organisations or NGOs to engage with the EU.

The session on **Engaging the Media** focused on how to tell a story, the interests of the media, working in partnership with media, and feeding information to the media. The session was facilitated by **Line Wolf Nielsen** (Communications & Press Coordinator, International Media Support). This session was followed by the **Utilising Social Media** session (facilitated by **Monika Grinschgl**, Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination) which focused on the concept of social media advocacy and discussed social media strategies for advocacy, rules of engagement with social media, and different social media channels e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

To give participants an idea about **developing advocacy messages**, a session was delivered by **Evan Jones** (Manager, ADSP) explaining different types of advocacy messages including advocacy letters, press releases, statements, and briefing notes. The session provided clear guidelines about the type of advocacy messages that are applicable, appropriate, and effective in different contexts.

In the final group work session of the course, participants divided into groups and worked on the same four advocacy issues as originally identified:
Group 1: Institutional Discrimination against the LGBTIQ+ Community
Group 2: Ongoing Hazara Genocide and Protection
Group 3: Access to Education for Afghan Girls
Group 4: Legal Aid for Resettlement of Afghan Refugees

The teams worked on planning and strategizing for advocacy on the above-mentioned issues and prepared presentations. Each team presented their advocacy strategy, plans and core advocacy message and received feedback from resource persons and fellow participants.

Sessions related to generating evidence for advocacy through research

For advocacy initiatives to be successful, **generating evidence** to develop and support advocacy strategies is critical. Research helps generate evidence to support advocacy messages and build a strong advocacy plan. The course incorporated sessions on research process and methodology to improve the participants' understanding of evidence-based advocacy.

The **Introduction to Research** session focused on the definition of research and its role in supporting advocacy. The session explained how research can be used to validate advocacy by giving advocacy initiatives and messages substance and grounding it in fact, helping to disprove myths, rumours, and false assumptions, provide evidence in favour of an advocate's position, explain why previous strategies have / have not worked, provide counter arguments to positions held by opposing stakeholders, provide insight into feasible and workable solutions to advocacy issues, provide case studies and examples to develop visual advocacy materials, shed light on often hidden elements of an issue – including unseen costs of inaction, demonstrate public support or public concern, demonstrate new/different perspectives around the issues, and provide the basis for media and public awareness raising advocacy activities.

Different types of research were introduced in the session and their application in different contexts was discussed. The session was co-facilitated by **Themba Lewis** (Head, MMC Asia and the Pacific) and **Shreya Bhat** (Research Officer, MMC Asia and the Pacific). The **Research Processes** session elaborated on the different steps involved in research: identifying the problem, setting research questions and objectives, deciding upon research methods, collecting and analysing data, and reporting findings. For hands-on learning, group work was incorporated in the session. Participants divided into groups to brainstorm appropriate research topics for their advocacy cause, identify research methodology and use of research findings to advance their cause. The session was facilitated by **Abdullah Mohammadi** (Regional Coordinator, MMC Asia and the Pacific) and **Themba Lewis.**

The concept and process of **Action Research** (facilitated by **Themba Lewis**) was discussed in the course**.** It provided an overview of the process of action research involving problem diagnosis, action planning and steps, and fact-finding about the result. **Abdullah Mohammadi** discussed the **contribution of research to evidence-based advocacy** in the following session and presented examples of MMC's research and publications and use of data for building narratives.

Sessions related to advocacy initiatives of significance

A good practice of human rights-based advocacy: Opening Universities for Refugees (OUR) was introduced to the participants in a session facilitated by **Dr. Gül İnanç.** The module introduced the on-going activities of an educational initiative called OUR, which has been advocating for inclusive higher education and working closely with displaced youth in Southeast Asia (and now globally) since 2016.

The **Introduction to successful campaigns** session provided one of the participants **Frishta Bastan** the opportunity to share the experience of her organisation Afghan Youth Engagement and Development Initiative (AYEDI) in Canada. She provided a step-by step guide on how her team mobilized the Afghan diaspora in Canada for Afghanistan, under the project Canadian Campaign for Afghan Peace.

In the session on **Strengthening links with Afghan civil society actors outside of Afghanistan,** the findings of a rapid survey of post August 2021 migrants, conducted by Afghanistan Civil Society Forum-organization (ACSFo), Afghan-Canadian Civil Society Forum (Canada) and Human Rights Promotion and Protection Initiative (Asia, Europe, USA and Canada), were shared by **Aziz Rafiee** (Executive Director, Afghanistan Civil Society Forum-organization)**,** a prominent figure with over 23 years of engagement and contribution in Afghanistan civil society. The survey covered 17 countries with a sample size of 527. The findings of the survey drew attention to the brain drain crisis, the need for solidarity, potential scope of work for Afghan diaspora and refugees despite the cultural shock, and the hope of Afghans to one day return to their country of origin. It emphasised the mechanisms for finding common grounds, and strategic issues and directions for advocacy.

In the course, a newly developed **Advocacy Toolkit for Diaspora Organisations** was introduced to participants. The toolkit was co-developed by DRC, CAPRS and ADSP. The toolkit has been developed to offer practical guidance to diaspora actors in different areas: (1) Diaspora Fundraising, (2) Community Outreach (3) Networking and Alliances Building and (4) Advocacy. Diaspora communities, organisations, and individuals are increasingly vocal and influential, advocating for social, economic, and political change in their country of origin, the country of residence and in the international sphere. This toolkit provides practical guidance for diaspora organisations in their advocacy work. An overview of the sections of the toolkit was presented to the participants. The participants then divided into groups to go through the toolkit and provide feedback and input for improving the toolkit. The feedback from participants were later incorporated into the toolkit.

A discussion on **strengthening links with Afghan national civil society and civil society leaders in exile** was included in the course. **Fiona Gall** and **Niamatuallah Rahi** from Afghanistan based organisation ACBAR joined online from Kabul to share recent developments on the ground, and how the scope of work for civil society organisations is becoming restricted in Afghanistan. The major challenges mentioned were:
- Interferences from the de-facto authorities to share information
- Detention of civil society actors, and the forced closure of some offices
- Coordination among government ministries is weak
- The new guideline for NGOs introduced by the de-facto authorities gives somewhat of a direction, although there is room for improvement
- The de-facto authorities are enforcing prohibitive measures on NGOs' financial transactions. This is causing difficulty for national NGOs to receive development and humanitarian aid.

- There is a lack of capacity within de-facto authorities to manage economic and social development. Moreover, there is lack of consistency in the de-facto authorities' work and decisions due to frequent changes of human resources within the system.
- There is a lack of basic service delivery; the Afghan Diaspora can play a role on this issue.

Networking and advocacy opportunities

The course was designed to help participants develop a comprehensive understanding of the different roles of key stakeholders including governments, civil society, humanitarian agencies, UN bodies, and media to leverage effective advocacy and to promote the rights of displaced Afghans. Participants representing different Afghan ethnic communities attended the course, including Pashtun, Hazara, Tajik, and Uzbek. Afghanistan has as many as fourteen recognised ethnic groups and a long history of ethnic division and violence. To ensure cohesion among the different participants, several icebreaking sessions and networking opportunities were built into the course design including a dedicated sessions on peacebuilding, an ice-breaking dinner on the first day, and a networking dinner on the second last day. The **peace-building session** was facilitated by **Line Brylle** (Protection Specialist, DRC) on the first day of the course.

During the course, participants were given the opportunity to present elevator pitches on their advocacy initiatives in front of their peers and resource persons. Five participants were called upon each day to present their pitch. The presenters received feedback on their advocacy work and approach from attendees and facilitators to help them strengthen their strategy initiatives.

As a special advocacy opportunity, **Lars Bo Møller,** Special Representative of Denmark for Afghanistan and **Mads Hovøre Andersen**, Special Advisor for Afghanistan attended a lunch with the course participants. One of the participants, **Maryam Rahimi**, facilitated a discussion and Q&A session discussing Danish engagement in Afghanistan, the situation of Afghan asylum seekers and refugees in Denmark and the situation of marginalized groups in Afghanistan.

Feedback from participants

The course ended with certificate distribution and a closing session. Feedback on the overall course was collected from the participants through an anonymous online survey. In their feedback on the course, the participants noted their thanks for an informative and useful course with relevant sessions. The online sessions towards end of the day were noted as fascinating, but suggestions were made for in-person resource persons.

Despite the long days, nearly all participants found the sessions to be useful and the interactive structure of the course allowed participants to engage. The group work activities were especially highlighted as beneficial, as the participants were able to get to know each other both on a personal and professional level.

The participants desired more time for the elevator pitches to be discussed. Some participants mentioned that sitting next to different people each day allowed the participants to get to know different people. Satisfaction with logistic arrangement was noticed in the feedback. The proximity of the venue from the hotel was convenient and appreciated.

Follow-up and next steps

While the course design was found to be effective by participants, the co-organisers have explored additional sessions which may prove useful in the future such as 'fundraising' or 'access to funding for advocacy activities'. Having the opportunity to meet and discuss in person with the Special Representative of Denmark for Afghanistan and Special Advisor for Afghanistan was encouraging for the participants and the appreciation from the participants was noticeable.

In the selection of participants, beside ensuring gender balance and diversity in ethnicity and geography, age should also be considered and diaspora from older age group should also be included. Further work will be done to make future courses as inclusive and useful as possible. Whilst there are no set plans for a future course, it was suggested that a similar course would be useful in Q3 of 2023.
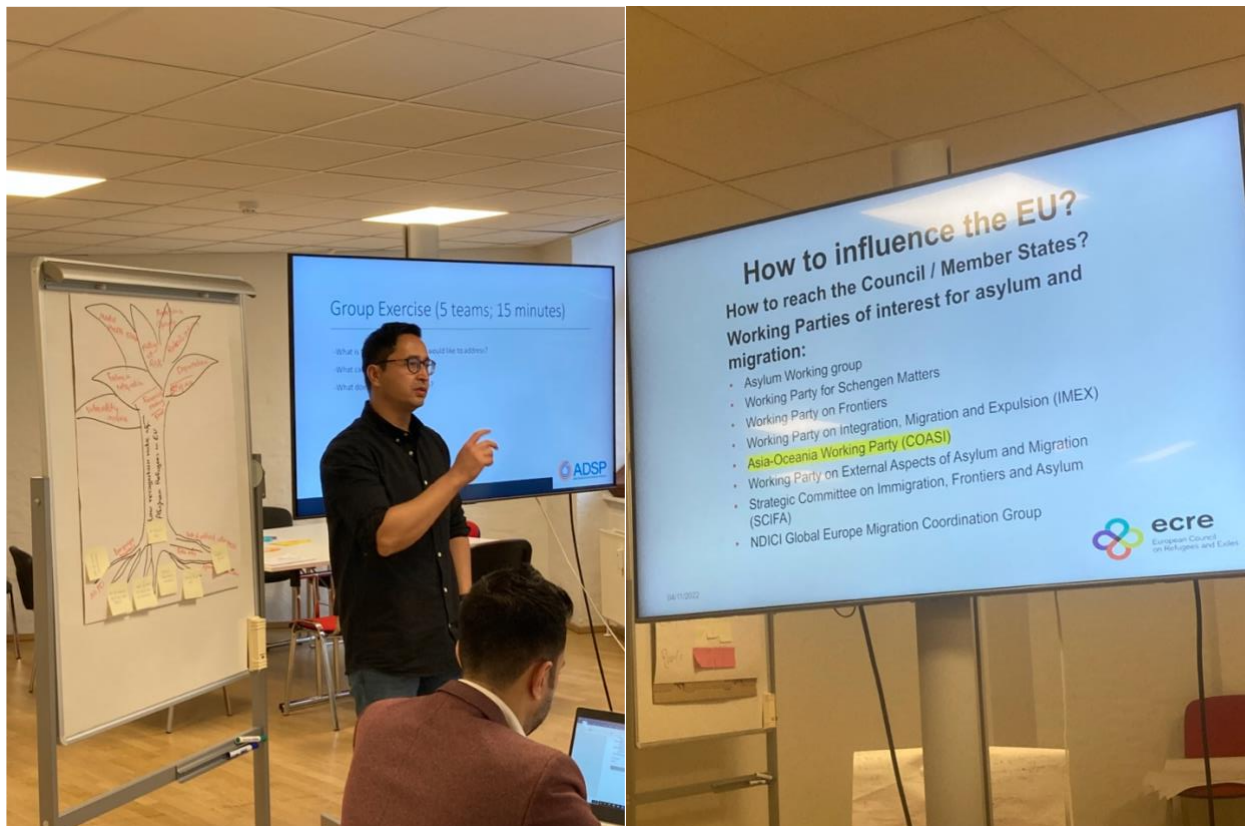

Photo Credit: ADSP

Day 1 – Thursday, 3 November 2022		
Time slot	**Session description**	**Resource person**
09.00 – 10.30	**Welcome and objectives of the course** 1. Welcome remarks & introduction (all) 2. Housekeeping 3. Introduction of participants / outlining participant expectations of workshop 4. Ice-breaker activity 5. Participants' advocacy goals	1. All 2. Adrien Bory, *DRC* 3. Iffat Anjum, *ADSP* 4. Evan Jones, *ADSP* 5. Iffat Anjum, *ADSP*
10.30 – 10.45	*Coffee break*	
10.45 – 12.00	**Refresher on human rights** - *International human rights instruments*	Brennan Webert, *DRC Protection team*
12.00 – 13.00	*Lunch break*	
13.00 – 14.30	**Introduction to advocacy** - *What is advocacy?* - *Principles and guidelines* - *Key elements for successful advocacy*	Evan Jones, *ADSP*
14.30 – 14.45	*Coffee break*	
14.45 – 15.45	**Building trust for joint action: conflict management tools**	Line Brylle, *DRC*
15.45 – 17.15	**Identity, Culture and Intercultural Dialogue** *This module introduced topics of identity and culture in the context of civil society advocacy in diaspora settings. Through various activities participants engaged in discussions on how politics of identity and intercultural dialogue can play a role in advocacy and how public art can be used as an effective tool.*	Dr. Gül İnanç *(online)* *Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies (CAPRS)*
18.00	**Welcome Dinner:** *Restaurant*	
Day 2 – Friday, 4 November 2022		
09.00 – 09.20	**Ice-breaking and elevator pitch by participants** *Participants shared existing and future advocacy goals*	Evan Jones, Iffat Anjum *(ADSP)*
09.20 – 10.30	**Planning for advocacy**	Evan Jones, *ADSP*

10.30 – 10:45	*Coffee break*	
10.45 – 12.00	**Problem tree analysis (group – exercise)** - *Including power and privilege*	Iffat Anjum, *ADSP*
12.00 – 13:00	*Lunch break*	
13.00 – 14.00	**Mapping Stakeholders** - *Knowing your audience* - *Power mapping – identifying key stakeholders.*	Adrien Bory, *DRC*
14.00 – 15.00	**Engaging the media** - *How best to tell a story* - *How to work in partnership with media?* - *How to feed information to the media? What interests them?*	Line Wolf Nielsen, Communications & Press Coordinator, DJ Safety Grant Manager, International Media Support
15.00 – 15.15	*Coffee break*	
15.15 –16:30	**Utilising social media**	Monika Grinschgl, *Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination (DEMAC)*
16:30 – 17:30	**The importance of advocating at the EU level**	Reshad Jalali, *European Council of Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)*
Day 3 – Saturday, 5 November 2022		
09.00 – 09.20	**Ice-breaking and elevator pitch by participants** *Participants shared existing and future advocacy goals*	Evan Jones, Iffat Anjum *(ADSP)*
09.20 – 10.20	**Introduction to Research** - *What is research?* - *How can it support advocacy?* - *Types of research*	Themba Lewis/Shreya Bhat, *MMC*
10.20 – 10.30	*Coffee break*	
10.30 – 11.30	**Research process** - *Identifying the problem* - *Setting research questions and objectives* - *Deciding research methods* - *Collecting and analysing data* - *Dissemination*	Themba Lewis/Abdullah Mohammadi, *MMC*

11.30 – 12.30	**Introduction to action research** - *What is action research? What is community action research?* - *Action research process: problem diagnosis, action planning and steps, fact-finding about the result*	Themba Lewis, *MMC*
12.30 – 13.30	*Lunch Break*	
13.30 – 15.00	**Contribution of research to evidence-based advocacy** - *Introduction to 4Mi and MMC publications* - *Using research data in building narrative*	Abdullah Mohammadi, *MMC*
15.00 – 15.15	*Coffee break*	
15.15 – 16.15	**Input to new Advocacy toolkit**	Nora Ragab and Adrien Bory (online)
16.15 – 17.00	**Strengthening links with Afghan civil society actors outside of Afghanistan** - *Importance of strong connectivity for grounded messaging and mutual support*	Aziz Rafaiee, *ACSFo*
Day 4 – Sunday, 6 November 2022		
09.00 – 09.30	**Ice-breaking and elevator pitch by participants** *Participants shared existing and future advocacy goals*	Evan Jones, Iffat Anjum *(ADSP)*
09.30 – 10.30	**Advocacy with United Nations**	Nicolas Brass, *UNHCR* (online)
10.30 – 10.45	*Coffee break*	
10.45 – 12.00	**Introduction to campaigning: successful campaigns** *"Canadian Campaign for Afghan Peace" by Afghan Youth Engagement and Development Initiative*	Frishta Bastan, AYEDI
12.00 – 13.00	*Lunch break*	
13.00 – 14.30	**Developing advocacy messages & group exercise**	Evan Jones and Adrien Bory
14.30 – 15.15	**Strengthening links with Afghan national civil society and civil society leaders in exile**	Fiona Gall, *ACBAR*

	- *Importance of strong connectivity for grounded messaging and mutual support*	
15.15 – 15.30	*Coffee break*	
15.30 – 16.30	**A good practice of human rights-based advocacy: Opening Universities for Refugees**	Dr. Gül İnanç *(online)* CAPRS
18.00	Group Dinner	
Day 5 – Monday, 7 November 2022		
09.00 – 09.20	**Ice-breaking and elevator pitch by participants** *Participants shared existing and future advocacy goals*	Iffat Anjum, *ADSP*
09.20 – 10.20	**Engaging with governments**	Ida Lund, *Advocacy Advisor, DRC*
10.20 – 10.30	*Coffee break*	
10.30 – 12.00	***Group Breakout*** - *Planning and strategizing for advocacy*	Adrien Bory, *DRC* Abdullah Mohammadi, *MMC*
12.00 – 12.30	*Lunch break*	
12.30 – 14.00	**Presentation of group work** - *Participants to present their advocacy strategies and report back*	
14.00 – 14.30	**Closing Session** - *Feedback* - *Certificate Ceremony*	Evan Jones, *ADSP* Adrien Bory, *DRC* Themba Lewis/Abdullah Mohammadi, *MMC*