



# Diaspora Support to Durable Solutions: Afghans in Europe

15 November 2019, Danish Architecture Center (DAC), Copenhagen

**DRS** DANISH  
REFUGEE  
COUNCIL  
DIASPORA  
PROGRAMME

With support from:

**giz**

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF DENMARK  
**DANIDA** | INTERNATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

# PREFACE

This report is a result of a conference hosted by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) to support the dissemination and discussion of the report “Afghan Diaspora in Europe: Mapping engagement in Denmark, Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom” led by Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (MGSoG) / UNU-MERIT and discuss a way forward on some of the critical issues raised regarding the organisation and effectiveness of the Afghan diaspora in achieving development and humanitarian outcomes both in host countries and abroad. With the support of DANIDA and GIZ, this conference brought together 93 participants from 11 European countries and Afghanistan at the Danish Architectural Center on 15 November 2019.

The conference was a result of coordination across agencies, including IOM and GIZ, who have conducted complementary mapping exercises and workshops, respectively. The conference was planned with the Vienna Institute for Dialogue and Cooperation’s (VIDC) conference entitled ‘Knowledge Transfer and Support: The Role of the Afghan Diaspora in Europe’ (2-3 December 2019) in mind, ensuring complementary panel discussions on funding, women’s rights, integration, and education and vocational training.

The conference consisted of two components. The first component focused on reviewing the contents of the Afghan Diaspora in Europe report and a presentation of the Afghan Government’s Diaspora Engagement Policy (Draft). These two presentations complimented each other in providing an update on the situation as it stands, highlighting the importance of the diaspora both in Europe and in Afghanistan, and prompting discussion surrounding the future of diaspora engagement. The second component of the conference consisted of four panel discussions on themes from the report and moderated by the DRC Diaspora Programme, the Afghan Displacement Solutions Platform, and Chatham House. Panelists included leaders of Afghan Diaspora Organisations (ADO) and Afghan Civil Society Organisations. Topics of the panels included: Successful advocacy for the rights of Afghan refugees, Strengthening Diaspora engagement in relief and development activities, improving national and European collaboration, and diaspora contributions to the Global Refugee Forum. The conference provided a platform for productive discussion and networking that will be used to advance future programming most relevant to the Afghan diaspora based on the hurdles yet to be overcome to achieve a constructive and less fragmented Afghan diaspora voice at the national- and European-level.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADO	Afghan Diaspora Organisation	MoRR	Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation
ADSP	Asia Durable Solutions Platform		
ANDEP	Afghan National Diaspora Engagement Policy	MGSoG	Maastricht Graduate School of Governance
CSO	Community-based Organisation	MMC	Mixed Migration Centre
DRC	Danish Refugee Council	NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
GCM	Global Compact on Migration	UN	United Nations
GCR	Global Compact for Refugees	VIDC	Vienna Institute for Dialogue and Cooperation
GRF	Global Refugee Forum		
IOM	International Organisation for Migration		

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The opinions expressed in this report should not be attributed to the Danish Refugee Council, GIZ and/ or DANIDA. The contents of this report are solely a summary of conference proceedings and discussion. Comments on this report are welcomed and should be directed to the Danish Refugee Council Civil Society Engagement Unit. These can be addressed to Adrien Bory [adrien.bory@drc.ngo].

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

The need for broader engagement with diaspora organisations and the diaspora more broadly was raised repeatedly – this includes by the Afghan Government, European Governments, non-diaspora organisations (international and national), as well as between the diaspora itself. Specifically, participants and panelists felt there was a need for increased visibility of refugees and the diaspora in consequential policy and advocacy fora. Adequate and consistent representation was seen to be premised on stronger collaboration amongst the diaspora with the aim of achieving a coordinated voice and concerted action on key issues of broad interest to the diaspora, including basic protections and strengthened integration. In this case, there was a recognition that, given the diversity of the diaspora, a discussion of key issues that affect different ethnicities, generations, genders and religious backgrounds equally should be prioritized in order to identify which issues the diaspora can rally around. Specific recommendations pertaining to the themes of the conference are presented below.

## STRENGTHENING ADVOCACY FOR MIGRANTS (INCLUDING ASYLUM SEEKERS) IN EUROPE

- Solidarity is needed amongst the Afghan Diaspora Organisations (ADOs) to work towards a more consistent voice promoting the upholding of basic rights. Collaborative advocacy efforts that capitalize on the variety of expertise within and across European countries as well as those working on return issues in Afghanistan will improve on the efficacy of existing initiatives.
- ADOs should look to form advocacy partnerships with like-minded host country and cross-European organisations who are pursuing similar causes.
- High-level conferences regarding the diaspora, asylum seekers, and migration in Europe lack the participation of refugees and the diaspora more broadly. International organisations and NGOs must advocate and provide a platform for the inclusion of diaspora voices whenever possible.
- The Afghan Government should seek to include consultations with diaspora organisations active in supporting asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers in Europe prior to engagements with European governments on forced returns.
- Advocacy messages should also focus on positive stories of how Afghans are contributing to host society and overcoming barriers to establishing better lives for themselves and their children.
- Advocacy messages on ‘negative’ issues must be clear and focus on issues that have the potential for broader support, including establishing red lines for forced returns of children, people who have never lived in Afghanistan, and people with special vulnerabilities (elderly, ill, orphans, etc.).

## STRENGTHENING DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN AFGHANISTAN

- Programming in Afghanistan is generally poorly coordinated amongst ADOs and between ADOs, humanitarian organisations and the Afghan Government. ADOs should consider joining existing initiatives in order to improve scale and quality rather than starting new projects as this will increase the impact of limited resources.
- Fault lines in the diaspora community (e.g., ethnic, generational) are a barrier to cooperation. ADOs should focus on joint technical- or quality-centered objectives to maintain effect dialogue.

- The formation of umbrella organisations or other coordination mechanisms was identified as a key aspect to ensuring streamlining of efforts.

## **IMPROVING DIASPORA COLLABORATION AT THE NATIONAL- AND EUROPEAN-LEVEL**

- Coordination should be based on small initiatives that gather like-minded organisations, with the opportunity to increase membership and scope over time.
- Lack of clarity surrounding definitional issues (e.g., umbrella organization, network, coordination) is contributing to lack of productive conversations on the future of a more coordinate diaspora landscape. Agreeing on terminology and the primary focus of such structures would help having more productive discussions.
- Afghan organisations should be exposed to other diaspora's organisations (e.g., Somali) and coordination bodies in order to understand different ways of collaborative working and to learn from successes.
- Lack awareness and capacity to engage with funding mechanisms is a key barrier to effective and sustainable programming.
- Support the neutrality of discussions of future coordination efforts using external facilitators due to the required level of detail in discussions and the sensitivity of some subject matter.
- In the long-term, opportunities to engage with funding and accessing adequate capacity support and discouraging unnecessary competition over resources could be a core service of an umbrella organization.

## **DIASPORA CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM**

- Facilitating organisations, including DRC, should establish a mechanism for consistently disseminating information about the Global Refugee Forum processes and opportunities for diaspora engagement.
- Facilitating organisations, including DRC, should continue to engage the diaspora in the Global Refugee Forum process through consultations and, where possible, direct engagement.
- Afghan diaspora organisations should monitor non-binding pledges made by governments and report on the degree of follow-up to ensure accountability and momentum.
- Opportunities for collective action and advocacy between international, national and local diaspora organisations and other like-minded organisations should be identified following the pledging conference and shared with interested stakeholders.

## WAY FORWARD

- **Additional diaspora studies should be conducted in France and Austria** as well as other major Afghan diaspora populations to build on the Afghan Diaspora in Europe Report.
- Conference participants broadly supported **additional meetings that would provide an opportunity to maintain momentum** on key issues raised in the Afghan Diaspora in Europe Report. Meetings that include national host and origin governments are encouraged to ensure awareness of key issues.
- The DRC Diaspora programme should consider organizing **learning conferences between Afghan and other diaspora groups** who have made significant progress in coordination. Networking events across diaspora groups also allow for coordination on issues of interest to multiple groups, for example, upholding and strengthening protections for asylum seekers in Europe.



 **H.E DR. ALEMA**  
Deputy Minister  
Ministry for Refugees and Repatriations.  
(Afghanistan)

# OPENING REMARKS

## **HE DR. ALEMA, DEPUTY MINISTER, MINISTRY FOR REFUGEES AND REPATRIATIONS, AFGHANISTAN**

Dr. Alema began by thanking DRC for organizing the conference and for the attendance of the diaspora organization representatives. She highlighted that migration is an issue that is deeply embedded in Afghan culture due to 40 years of war and the continued need for those under threat to seek opportunity elsewhere. While the government and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations specifically, have tried to prevent forced displacement as well as forced returns, often pressures internally and externally challenge these policies. Beyond managing displacement and returns, the Ministry is also interested in focusing on more positive aspects of migration – including how those who are outside Afghanistan permanently can help those remaining improve their condition. Dr. Alema introduced the Draft Diaspora Engagement Policy, to be presented in the coming session with Senior Advisor, David Majed. Dr. Alema pointed to the significance of diaspora contributions already occurring outside formal arrangements, including remittances as well as social and cultural exchanges. She highlighted the contribution of qualified Afghans who have returned permanently or temporarily work in the public service, start businesses, or contribute their technical skills to hospitals and universities. As Afghanistan moves towards a peace agreement, Dr. Alema highlighted the important role local and international organisations will play in implementing lasting peace - and the diaspora should not be excluded. Peace means that there will be increased space for diaspora organisations, tourism, business investment, and temporary or permanent returns – especially for skilled professionals. She highlighted the unique position of the diaspora in advocating for the protection of women's rights – demonstrating that they deserve opportunities to contribute equally in society. The Afghan diaspora has and will continue to contribute in the areas of sports, media, and the arts – encouraging a positive image of the country. Dr. Alema concluded by wishing for productive discussions today and for peace in Afghanistan.

## **PETER KLANSO, HEAD OF PROGRAMME DIVISION, DRC**

Peter Klanso began by thanking Dr. Alema and welcoming the participants before reflecting on how he has witnessed the everyday power of the diaspora in Denmark in advocating for the rights of their communities both at home and abroad. Drawing on a recent experience with the Somali diaspora, he noted that the authority in their advocacy efforts came from the passion they had for both Denmark and Somalia and also highlighted the potential for the diaspora as an effective agent of change in their home countries. Peter Klanso also acknowledged the tension that comes with working with the diaspora. He noted that the Danish Refugee Council works across many countries where domestic and transnational terrorism are serious and reoccurring risks; remittances can be a significant source of good and provide family members at home critical financing for business, education and daily needs – but, likewise, remittances can finance negative activities. In this sense, some diaspora engagement can be destructive to the home countries and host countries. It can also be destructive to the broader diaspora who suffers from a restrictive political and financial environment due to these fears (e.g., banking policies). We need to acknowledge that this is a barrier to diaspora to engage and partners to engage with the diaspora. Peter Klanso highlighted the Mixed Migration Centre 2019 Annual Report (Mixed Migration Futures) that looks at demographic and economic shifts as a result of global migration patterns. The report outlined the role migration has in helping to support shrinking populations in the Global North and in contributing to economic development – but that migration is not being encouraged. This can be seen in the increase in border control and restrictive migration policies. He mentioned that the diaspora can contribute to personalising global migration patterns and demonstrating the positive sides of migration and can also support in reducing negative outcomes; however, a vision of the diaspora for the future and how it contributes to world prosperity is required to realise this potential. Peter Klanso noted that The Diaspora

Engagement Policy is a positive start, but a complementary policy from the Danish Government and other European governments, presenting a strategic approach to how Denmark perceives the value of constructive diaspora engagement and commits to support and facilitate it, would add much value. It was also clear that the diaspora will need to be more strategic in working together to achieve these goals.

## **AFGHAN DIASPORA IN EUROPE: MAPPING ENGAGEMENT IN DENMARK, GERMANY, SWEDEN, AND THE UNITED KINGDOM**

**MELISSA SIEGEL, PROFESSOR OF MIGRATION STUDIES, MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY & UN-MERIT**

Prof. Melissa Siegel led the team who developed the report 'Afghan Diaspora in Europe: Mapping Engagement in Denmark, Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom', which provided the basis for the conference today. The objectives of the study were to map Afghan diaspora organisations, determine level of engagement on a variety of programme themes, and identify common challenges and opportunities for further engagement. Prof. Siegel emphasized the importance of understanding the capacity needs



of organisations in order to make relevant and feasible recommendations for further engagement. She began by highlighting the diversity within the diaspora in regard to ethnicity, political affiliations or views, time of arrival, generation, and religious beliefs. In Denmark the divisiveness of the Afghan diaspora was clear, but it is particularly visible along generational lines – where young people are more likely to see integration into Danish society as a key objective. Germany hosts the largest Afghan diaspora population in Europe, though there are significant socio-economic distinctions between arrivals in the 1970s to 1990s and recent arrivals. The diaspora in Germany is also uniquely insular and focused on integration rather than cross-diaspora engagement outside of family. Sweden has ethnic divisions that align closely with time of arrival in Sweden, with most recent arrivals being Hazara who mainly migrated from Iran. Sweden is also unique in that nearly 50 percent of recent arrivals are unaccompanied male minors. The UK hosts a significant and diverse diaspora, that is increasingly experiencing cultural clashes between first- and second-generation diaspora in regard to social norms.

The mapping exercise identified **462 Afghan Diaspora Organisations (ADOs) across Denmark (96), Germany (129), Sweden (133), and the UK (104)**, with the majority founded between 2010 and 2016 following large influxes of Afghan migrants after the withdrawal of most international troops from Afghanistan. Prof. Siegel highlighted that **the number of ADOs per country does not correlate with the size of the Afghan diaspora**; Germany has a diaspora population approximately five times that of Sweden, but fewer ADOs. She reviewed the engagement of ADOs in each programme sector by-country and suggests that the areas and the level of engagement by ADOs vary among the focus countries due to needs, opportunities, and the characteristics of the diaspora population. For example, supporting integration of Afghans into host communities is more prominent in Sweden (74%) and the UK (42%) as opposed to Germany (22%) and Denmark (17%). While all diaspora members reported remaining connected to events in Afghanistan, the mapping exercise identified mixed engagement with humanitarian and development activities: German and British ADOs are significantly (63% and 40%, respectively) compared to Swedish (7%), and Danish (19%) organisations.

Prof. Siegel emphasised that the **largest challenge facing ADOs are internal divisions along ethnic, political, generational, time of arrival, and religious lines** - limiting the willingness to coordinate interventions. Capacity challenges and difficulties accessing funding, as well as limitations to working in Afghanistan due to a combination of security, bureaucratic and social reasons were also cited as key. To address these challenges, the report made several recommendations. First, **there is a need to support social cohesion amongst the diaspora and encourage the participation of young people in ADO activities**. Youth will be critical to overcoming many of the traditional divisions, though it will require a change in ways of working. Prof. Siegel noted that, while it was clear that there is a need for increased formal coordination mechanisms, these should start small and build on successes already identified and focus on supporting other challenges identified such as capacity development, fundraising, and advocacy.

During the discussion period, participants indicated **disappointment regarding divisions within the diaspora community that limit the effectiveness of ADO activities**, while also recognizing the reality of this particular challenge. Prof. Siegel highlighted that young people are able to overcome ethnic barriers more willingly than the older generations, though many young people – particularly second generation – struggle to balance the perspectives and wishes of their parents with their own beliefs. She mentioned that diaspora organisations founded in previous decades will have to work quickly and openly to incorporate youth and new ways of working or they may not be sustainable in the long run. On the theme of ensuring activities and ways of working remain relevant, one participant wondered whether the focus on activities related to culture and integration was a result of funding. Prof. Siegel acknowledged that funding could be a factor, but also the influx of arrivals created a sudden demand for these types of activities. Several participants noted the need to include other prominent diaspora-hosting European countries in the study, including Austria and France.<sup>1</sup>

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1 IOM has recently conducted a mapping study that covered the Netherlands, Canada and the USA. The study is forthcoming.



# THE DRAFT AFGHAN NATIONAL DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT POLICY (ANDEP)

## DAVID MAJED, SENIOR ADVISOR, MINISTRY OF REFUGEES AND REPATRIATIONS

David Majed introduced the session by acknowledging the importance of the diaspora to the Afghan government as development partners and that the Afghan National Diaspora Engagement Policy (ANDEP) is a reflection of this. He reminded audience members that the policy is currently in draft form – but that the final approved version will remain open to amendments over its ten-year implementation period based on contextual changes and progress. ANDEP is comprised of four sections and 13 chapters, David Majed led a discussion of each section – highlighting critical points in each for discussion.

Section One of ANDEP is focused on outlining definitions and objectives of the policy. ANDEP takes a very liberal understanding of the diaspora: it includes up to seven generations born abroad, regardless of citizenship. The importance of a stable security situation in Afghanistan, positive representations of Afghanistan abroad, and respecting the diversity and richness of Afghan culture were highlighted as goals that will attract further diaspora engagement, creating opportunities for economic growth and investment. The policy acknowledges the importance of remittances, so would like to reduce barriers and fees for sending money through official channels. He highlighted that matters of ethnicity, gender, and religion are not considered as critical and that ANDEP adopts diversity, inclusiveness, ownership and dialogue as core values. David Majed acknowledged that working with the diaspora has been challenging in the past as it is something that requires the engagement of all Ministries (e.g., Industry, Education, Health). This will be a key principle of the approach going forward. The policy has been based on research to understand the current situation of the diaspora; thus, Section Two is dedicated to outlining the Government's current understanding. David Majed highlighted that the bulk of the diaspora currently live in Asia, particularly in Iran and Pakistan – but that other significant populations in North America and Europe are also critical (e.g., USA, Germany). Relevant to the broader conference discussions, the role of independent diaspora organisations as well as umbrella organisations were highlighted. Additional initiatives including a government-issued diaspora card to facilitate travel and business as well as extended voting rights were also mentioned.

Section Three is the core of the Diaspora Engagement Policy as it highlights the various policy directions that will be taken by the Government of Afghanistan. David Majed highlighted the importance of economic growth through diaspora investment and Afghanistan-focused businesses (e.g., travel agencies). He also broadened this to acknowledge the economic development contributions made by diaspora-initiated community development projects. This led naturally into the second policy direction, which is improved capacity building networks – referring specifically to contributions that can be made by qualified and skilled professionals abroad. David Majed emphasized the importance of leveraging the skills of retired professionals who may be interested in short- or long-term stays in Afghanistan to train young people. Policy direction three and four were closely linked as advocacy objectives focused strongly on promoting positive images of Afghanistan abroad while cultural engagement objectives also involved positive engagement with sport, arts, and media. The presentation session was concluded by reviewing Section Four of ANDEP, which focused on implementation and continual engagement with the diaspora. The importance of constant dialogue and building natural opportunities for consultation and collaboration were highlighted.

Audience members applauded the steps taken and emphasised that the diaspora also need to take steps to organize themselves outside of government mechanisms. Some mentioned that the plan was quite ambitious, so having 10 years to realise the objectives is welcomed. One participant noted that, as divisions exist within the diaspora, so do divisions between the diaspora and Afghans in Afghanistan. Specifically, some audience members believed that those who have remained in Afghanistan throughout the conflict are not always accepting or trusting of diaspora returning to provide support. Due to time restrictions and a high level of interest in ANDEP, a side event has been scheduled to support Government-diaspora engagement. A summary of that meeting is available as Annex 1.

# PANEL DISCUSSION: SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY FOR THE RIGHTS OF AFGHAN REFUGEES

## FACILITATOR: ANNA STEIN, COORDINATOR, ASIA DISPLACEMENT SOLUTIONS PLATFORM

**Panelists:** Kava Spartak, Managing Director, Yaar [Germany]; Reshad Jalali, Policy Officer, European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) [Belgium]; Abdul Ghafoor Rafiey, Director and Founder Afghanistan Migrants Advice and Support Organisation [Afghanistan]; Farida Ahmadi, Board member, Federation of Afghan Refugee Organisations in Europe (FAROE) [Norway].

### HIGHLIGHTS

- **Diaspora organisations can offer valuable feedback to the Afghan government and EU governments regarding migration and returns.**
- **Solidarity is needed amongst diaspora organisations to best advocate for the needs of the entire Afghan community. The variety of expertise shows there are a lot of resources, but it is not used as effective as it could be.**
- **Focus on abuses and ‘negative’ advocacy is common, but there is a need to focus on positive contributions of the Afghan community to change entrenched narratives.**

Anna Stein opened the session by highlighting the barriers Afghans face to accessing their rights in Europe before asking Reshad to briefly update the audience on asylum policies at the EU-level. Reshad began by explaining that the rapid increase in migrants since 2015 has resulted in a number of policy changes focused on ‘externalising’ the migration issue (e.g., push-back policies, border detention, and conditionality of development aid). There has been an increase in informal agreements (i.e., without oversight of the European Parliament) with third countries for deportation of asylum seekers while other have readmission agreements with Afghanistan for failed asylum seekers. Recognition rates for Afghan asylum seekers are diverse across Europe, with some states only offering subsidiary protection (i.e., meaning no family rights, no nationality rights). The panel members agreed that **immigration policy and decision-making lacks transparency** due to rules being developed at a European-level, but derogations occurring at a national-level. Kava Spartak echoed this, noting that YAAR has been trying to provide support to asylum seekers, but that the decision-making process ‘feels like a lottery’ between the cases they manage. For the unsuccessful cases, Abdul Ghafoor Rafiey mentioned that forced returns have increased dramatically since the Joint Way Forward Agreement was signed, but that support is now limited to 12,500 Afghans per person. While he acknowledged some financial support is better than no support, he also highlighted that **many returns were first refugees in third countries or from different parts of Afghanistan with little or no social network in Kabul**. Critically, he suggested that the social stigma resulting from **‘failure’ to migrate often encourages immediate remigration**.

The moderator attempted to bring together key advocacy points that could be focused on, but it was clear from the panel that **issues experienced throughout the migration cycle are all critical**. She pushed the panelists by asking them to consider whether by focusing on immediate needs of asylum seekers that strategic advocacy issues lose focus. Kava Spartak agreed, noting that – even practically – organisations focus on a small number of asylum seekers in the midst of their hearing process while



ignoring the tens of thousands of others who are struggling to access basic services and integrate. Audience members pushed back and reiterated the importance of advocacy covering the entire migration cycle. Several audience members noted that asylum seekers are often poorly equipped to face the asylum process; women have reduced recognition rates due to failure to properly advocate for themselves largely due to social and cultural barriers. Others mentioned that they felt organisations were not doing enough to support potential migrants from Afghanistan by giving them correct information. Some audience members felt that many come to Europe with unrealistic expectations and then find themselves in a difficult situation. Abdul Ghafoor Rafiey agreed that advocating for increased transparency on asylum processes to those still in Afghanistan would not be about encouraging people to leave – but rather harm reduction for people making dangerous journeys on false or inaccurate information. Reshad defended focusing on asylum processes and deportations only because ADOs typically have limited capacity – so are forced to work on issues that constitute ‘damage control’ and there has been success. Specifically, he believed **there was great potential for ADOs to unite to focus on gathering consensus amongst European governments on ‘red lines’ for deportations: children, people not familiar with Afghanistan, people who are vulnerable (e.g., chronically ill, elderly)**. He acknowledged that for greater change, **having representation at larger conferences and forums where refugees can advocate for themselves – rather than being spoken for by Europeans and NGOs – is important.**

Audience members highlighted other positive practices, including ensuring that advocacy is not simply focused on ‘negative’ issues but also highlights the strengths and contributions of Afghans in Europe. Kava Spartak echoed the Afghan Diaspora in Europe report findings, mentioning that he felt that **diaspora youth showed the greatest potential to create a unified voice based on cooperation and issues of universal concern**. In concluding the session, the moderator asked for key takeaway points from the panelists. All highlighted the need to work together with a united voice to support the fair application of asylum procedures and to advocate for improved access to services for recent arrivals.

# PANEL DISCUSSION: STRENGTHENING DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

## MINGO HEIDUK, HEAD OF CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT UNIT, DRC

**Panelists:** Fiona Gall, Director, Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR); Rahela Sidiqi, Farkhunda Trust for Afghan Women's Education; Dr. Yahya Wardak, Afghanic e.V.; Maina Abbasi, Zainab Homam, CEO, Afghan Action UK.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- The diaspora is an important bridge to Afghanistan through pre-established cultural, linguistic and community ties.
- Lack of funding challenges the sustainability of many projects as many NGOs, INGOs and government agencies do not want to fund small projects.
- Lack of unity within the diaspora creates challenges to implementing coordinated humanitarian and development projects, demonstrating a need to adjust conversations to be based on common goals and technical solutions.

This panel discussion, moderated by Mingo Heiduk, was an opportunity to reflect on the opportunities and challenges that Afghan organisations face while providing humanitarian and development assistance in Afghanistan. This discussion was developed based on the findings of the Afghan Diaspora in Europe report, which found that while many organisations were interested in supporting communities in Afghanistan, but bureaucratic issues, an uncertain security, and lack of combined approaches with existing NGOs and the government limited the effectiveness of these interventions. Fiona Gall began the discussion by outlining ACBAR's perception of the strengths and weaknesses of working in Afghanistan. She highlighted that, despite the difficulties facing Afghanistan, it presented **a very clear governance landscape for NGOs** – including relevant national policies, registration processes, and national and international NGO Forums. However, similar to other countries in the region, funding has reduced significantly in recent years and has been focused on humanitarian and basic-needs focused projects. As highlighted in the Afghans in Europe report, **the security environment also continues to pose challenges even to organisations with a strong presence in the country** – particularly those interested in working in rural areas. She alluded to **the need for diaspora organisations to ensure projects are addressing gaps rather than duplicating efforts** of the 2,300 organisations registered in the country. Rahela Sidiqi echoed this comment, suggesting that the lack of coordination in activities is reducing impact of diaspora efforts in the country – but the capacity to coordinate in Afghanistan is limited due to lack of coordination amongst the diaspora even within Europe. In managing the lack of coordination, Dr. Yahya Wardak and Zainab Homan both mentioned that small-scale initiatives do have the potential to contribute to communities in Afghanistan, including health initiatives and micro-enterprise support; however, as organisations established in Afghanistan – both also mentioned **limited funding available to realize and maintain their projects**. Mingo Heiduk prompted the panelists to elaborate on the specific funding environment available to diaspora organisations. Panelists highlighted the challenges of working in organisations that rely on very small grants and/or donations from the community. As much



of the work is voluntary, this limits the potential scale of organization responses. The **lack of capacity to complete formal funding proposals** and follow-up on the scale of administration required to maintain grants is a barrier, as is the capacity to effectively advocate for the rights and needs of the diaspora and Afghans who have remained.

Audience members pointed to concerns that were alluded to earlier in the day during the Afghan Diaspora Engagement Policy discussion, led by David Majed. Specifically, diaspora members pointed to the suspicion that some Afghans hold regarding diaspora organisations. Dr. Yayha noted that, while suspicions will always exist, the **diaspora has the advantage over other organisations as they understand the issues at the local level and are familiar with local language and dialect – which can increase trust**. Furthermore, he highlighted the disappointment many felt over the international community in their engagement with Afghanistan in the last two decades. Fiona Gall built on this by mentioning the trend of diaspora returning with skills and qualifications that are of immense benefit to Afghanistan. Zainab Homan echoed this sentiment that sensitization is needed on both sides: to the stayee population on the benefits of diaspora contributions, but also to diaspora and their potential to make a difference in their country of origin. The discussion returned to ways of engagement; panelists mentioned that **the need to engage is there, but lack of clear pathways for diaspora involvement creates barriers as well as opportunities for corruption**.

Continuing on other themes from the morning session, audience members raised the challenge of coordinating between diaspora organisations in Afghanistan due to the ethnic divisions within the community. Rahela Sidiqi noted that, similar to other coordination approaches, coordination bodies are not meant to drive specific projects, but bring organisations together based on project subjects or technical sectors; **coordination must be understood as a technical process rather than a product of any specific political agenda**. Echoing this morning's comments by Prof. Melissa Siegel, the panelists were optimistic about the approach that youth have – where traditional divisions are giving way to shared values and objectives as Afghans abroad. Some audience members **welcomed the development of an action plan for improved coordination**. Fiona Gall responded that diaspora umbrella organisations would need to be developed outside the government leadership – these are forums by and for NGOs, so the diaspora must take a leadership role.

# PANEL DISCUSSION: IMPROVING NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN COLLABORATION

**HAMEED HAKIMI, RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, CHATHAM HOUSE**

**Panelists:** Khan Agha Dawoodzai, President, Bureau For Right Based Development; Assiya Majgan Amini, Afghan Academy International; Ali Eftekhari, World Hazara Council; Wali Shapour, Union of Afghan Associations in the Netherlands

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Ethnic and generational divisions are significant limiting factors to ADO coordination.
- Individual ADOs may avoid joining collective processes due to fears of losing independence – thus a focus on defining networks, coordination, and umbrella groups needs to be done transparently and collectively as a first step.
- Given the limited broad coordination successes in Europe, ADOs and other like-minded organisations must work towards building momentum in discussions and then ‘start small’.

Hameed Hakimi opened the panel by reflecting on the lack of successful coordination attempts amongst the Afghan diaspora community but also highlighting the need to examine the failures – and the small successes within them – to determine a way forward. He opened the floor to the panelists, after to invite them each to reflect on their own experience with coordination. Khan Agha Dawoodzai opened the conversation by reflecting on the success of Somali diaspora coordination in Europe to achieve greater recognition and suggested that learning lessons from this community is critical – including **understanding how definitional issues, such as the difference between ‘umbrella organization’ and ‘network’, sometimes unnecessarily hold improved coordination back.** He suggested that joint advocacy concerns and opportunities to improve capacity and programmes were unifying issues amongst the ADO landscape and that these should be founding objectives. Assiya Majgan Amini highlighted that Afghan Academy International was founded amongst the first wave of ADOs in the UK (1980s) and began with media and outreach as well as referrals to other service providers. She reflected that as more agencies formed, the landscape became more complex and informal collaboration was no longer possible. She mentioned limited but promising coordination attempts, but that there is an **increasing tendency toward competition amongst agencies** – which undermines the collective voice that is needed to effectively advocate for the rights of Afghans in Europe. Ali Eftekhari explained that the World Hazara Council focuses on social issues effecting the Hazara community in Europe, specifically in Austria, Belgium, and Sweden. While the group is narrow in coordination, they have lessons learned that could be shared with the broader community. Wali Shapour said that the Union of Afghan Associations in the Netherlands was founded based on need; influxes of asylum seekers in 2003 meant that the 36 organisations that now comprise the union had to work together to ensure that a wide variety of programming was available to those in need. He reflected the theme of youth engagement throughout the day, mentioning that **youth are often leading initiatives and able to more easily work past traditional divisions in the community – so including youth organisations in coordination actions are key.**

The audience and panelists engaged in extensive discussion about the relevance of ethnicity-centric coordination mechanisms. One audience member highlighted that, while abroad, **all Afghans are considered the same by host governments and all Afghans face similar discrimination – thus**

**the relevance of umbrella organisations focused on specific ethnicities are counter-productive to the greater need for collective action.** Others pointed to the religious imperative of working together: the Quran mentions the importance of equality and diversity, whereby differences are accepted and used to everyone's collective advantage. Some suggested that focused umbrella organisations encourage divided thinking, while others suggested targeted networks may support early coordination 'victories' and may be more responsive to how certain communities think on-the-ground. The moderator asked the panelists to reflect on what they thought of the potential of nationality-based organisations. Both Khan Agha Dawoodzai and Assiya Majgan Amini suggested that cooperation at the national level and even cooperation with those outside the diaspora community would bring the most effective results – but would take time to achieve. Khan emphasised that a key barrier has been that ADOs felt that if any authority was given to an umbrella organisation, individual ADOs will not be as relevant. He asserted that a lot of effort would need to be made to change this perception. Furthermore, he noted that the **frustration over lack of coordination has inspired the formation of many small coordination bodies which**



**compete with each other rather than work towards shared advocacy goals.** Assiya Majgan Amini added that many of these organisations have been built from nothing, so pride is affected when even a small portion of control over programming is lost. There is also a sense that organisations must compete with each other for limited resources due to a lack of trust between organisations.

Hameed Hakimi summarized the discussion, including the issue surrounding language and definitions (e.g., Diaspora, advocacy, umbrella, network, diversity, inclusion, equality) that distracts from the overall objective of providing for better outcomes for Afghans. Furthermore, he pointed out that both panelists and audience members **struggled with moving the discussion forward as ADOs themselves often have very loosely defined mandates that often shift as a result of available resources** (human and financial). He asserted that the overwhelming message of the discussion so far was the need to leave political associations outside the conversation of coordination as it served as a distraction from the overall purpose of coordination, which, as an audience member pointed out, was to recognize that Afghans are legally the same in Europe and thus must act together. He presented the panelists with a final opportunity to summarize their position on the way forward. **All panelists suggested that building a sense of inclusion, openness, and honesty within the ADO community was a first start.** Hameed Hakimi concluded the session by highlighting that no existing coordination body is without issues, so realistic expectations are needed. Ultimately, he suggested that keeping momentum in the coordination discussion was critical and that many of the **small issues that are holding back concrete action (e.g., definitional issues) must be addressed and then built on.**

## PANEL DISCUSSION: DIASPORA CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM

**FACILITATED BY: BÉATRICE MAUCONDUIT, PROJECT COORDINATOR, CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT UNIT, DRC**

Panelists: Nodira Aminova, Associate Protection Officer, UNHCR Regional Office for the Nordic Countries; Shahrzad Amoli, Advocacy Specialist, Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP); Najib Obaid Babakerkhail, Founder and Director, French Refugee Council; Miriam Saidi, Project Coordinator, Social Welfare and Economic Development of Afghanistan (SWEDA).

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Take advantage of the GRF momentum, the ‘whole of society’ approach, and don’t underestimate social media but rather use it as a tool.
- The importance of monitoring the pledges made by governments and hold them accountable to follow up, even if we know it is non-binding. Use GRF pledges made to put pressure on governments and national policies in hosting countries and to get Afghanistan back up on top of the agenda.
- There is a need to work toward an inclusive process to monitor the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, so all the stakeholders including the diaspora, the refugees and the returnees can actively participate and follow-up the progress of the CRFF in Afghanistan and the neighboring countries.

Béatrice Mauconduit introduced the session by reviewing the series of consultations DRC and the Asia Durable Solutions Platform (ADSP) held with civil-society organisations ahead of the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) (17-18 December 2019). She highlighted that this panel discussion would be focused on gathering additional feedback on the gaps or challenges faced during this process. She called on Nodira Aminova from the UNHCR Regional Office for the Nordic Countries to provide further context on the GRF. Nodira reviewed the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) and **outlined the importance of the GRF in providing an opportunity for us to monitor how United Nations (UN) organisations, the governments, and all the stakeholders are doing, to gather pledges and contributions, and to showcase good practices.**

In the ADSP- and ACBAR-hosted workshops in Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-e-Sharif, Shahrzad Amoli explained that safety and security was the main concern amongst stakeholders, though agencies also highlighted limited funding and insufficient attention on development issues (e.g., labour market and employment). He pointed to good practices in data access, the Citizens Charter, strong coordination systems, and the Un-funded toll-free complaints hotline. In Europe, Najib Obaid Babakerkhail emphasized that the asylum process and lack of inclusion in decision-making continue to be the main priorities for the diaspora and the refugees. Miriam Saidi and Béatrice Mauconduit noted that the Copenhagen workshop highlighted importance of changing narrative (i.e., refugees offering economic value) and directing focus on job creation, access to information, education and recognition of qualifications, and one-on-one mentoring.

During the discussion period, the audience was very engaged and raised several points on opportunities for advocacy and engagement – while also recognizing that organisations and communities would have to exert effort to ensure their voices were continued to be heard. The first question raised the issue of the **inclusion of Afghan diaspora voices in the Asia region, specifically in Iran and Pakistan.** Nodira Aminova acknowledged that the GRF is focused on the governmental and ministerial-level input in general, but that the ‘whole society approach’ required broad consultations. Béatrice Mauconduit noted that the Global Refugee-led Network held consultations in Asia, but she was not aware of specific engagement with this diaspora population. **Additional follow-up would be needed to determine what consultation have or could be conducted in the region.** One audience member highlighted that education in countries of origin is not the only challenge to durable solutions, but rather lack of recognition of education by host governments – limiting employment and further education opportunities. Najib Obaid Babakerkhail responded that the problem runs deeper – that managing arrivals with lack of basic education remains a huge challenge to durable solutions. Nodira Aminova built on this, stating that this challenge is directly linked to labour market and employment challenges that are of real concerns to European governments. Both panelists noted that the GRF offers a channel to highlight exactly these types of issues and that pledging countries should be coming with concrete practical solutions for these types of issues at a national and local level. Béatrice Mauconduit noted that the minutes from consultation meetings in Denmark were shared with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and challenges refugees are facing in regard to education and employment were highlighted.

Audience members expressed skepticism over pledging, particularly issues of accountability and keeping pledges relevant to on-the-ground issues. Nodira noted that **accountability reports will be made available to the public based on monitoring by UNHCR.** Beatrice acknowledged that pledges are not legally binding but can support advocacy points from both organisations and concerned individuals to their respective governments. Shahzad echoed this stating that the **GRF was a good opportunity for organisations to advocate for renewed attention and funding for Afghanistan specifically in the context of donor fatigue.** The panelists noted that conferences of this magnitude can seem to lack relevance to the daily struggles experienced by organisations and communities, but advocacy can play a role in showing the ‘on-the-ground’ side to more general opportunities and challenges. Najib Obaid Babakerkhail highlighted the importance of social media. Panelists encouraged the audience to stay involved and highlighted awareness campaigns launched to pressure member states to make relevant pledges and maintain the diaspora and refugees as key voices in the ‘whole of society’ approach.

## CONCLUSION

The conference was closed by final reflections by the panel moderators, who agreed that discussions were productive but that a significant amount of further work will be required to achieve the objectives set out earlier in the day. All moderators encouraged further opportunities for ADO members to meet and discuss issues of joint importance, including continuing discussions about means to increase solidarity and coordination within the Afghan diaspora.

Mingo Heiduk offered concluding remarks and thanked all participants, moderators, and panelists for their engagement and dedication to supporting the Afghan diaspora in Europe. She reflected that the divisions that were highlighted in the Afghans in Europe report and throughout the panel discussions should be further discussed, but that future work needs to move toward focusing on things that unite the diaspora and other like-minded organisations. She also emphasised that, while meetings can be facilitated by DRC, ultimately the most work will need to be done by the diaspora members and ADOs themselves. She concluded the session by acknowledging that the immense amount of passion that the participants have put into helping the diaspora is encouraging.

The DRC Diaspora programme plans to take forward several recommendations made today into future programming, hopefully leading to broader programmes to support the Afghan diaspora across Europe.



# **ANNEX:** Afghanistan National Diaspora Engagement Policy (ANDEP) Workshop

16 November 2019, Danish Refugee Council Headquarters, Copenhagen

**DRS** DANISH  
REFUGEE  
COUNCIL  
DIASPORA  
PROGRAMME

With support from:

**giz**

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF DENMARK  
**DANIDA** | INTERNATIONAL  
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# PREFACE

This report is a result of a workshop hosted by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) but convened and facilitated by the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR). The purpose of the workshop was to review the draft Afghan National Diaspora Engagement Policy (ANDEP) and gather. A total of 62 participants from 13 countries were represented.

The workshop began with a welcoming note from H.E. Deputy Minister Dr. Alema and was followed by working groups on each of the four sections of ANDEP. Groups later reconvened to discuss their feedback. Dr. Alema then closed the session. The workshop provided a platform for productive discussion and networking and was a unique opportunity for direct Government-diaspora dialogue. The participants in the workshop encouraged further similar engagements in order to ensure ANDEP remains relevant to the needs of the diaspora and that ADOs can remain engaged with implementation given their unique role in communicating ANDEP and bringing together the diaspora community in their respective areas of focus.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADO	Afghan Diaspora Organisation	IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ANDEP	Afghan National Diaspora Engagement Policy	MoRR	Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation
CSO	Community-based Organisation	NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
DRC	Danish Refugee Council	UN	United Nations
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation		

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The need for continued engagement on the Afghan National Diaspora Engagement Policy (ANDEP) between Afghan Diaspora Organizations (ADOs) and the Government of Afghanistan was highlighted consistently throughout the workshop. Diaspora representatives also reflected many of the recommendations stemming from the DRC Diaspora Conference 'Afghans in Europe' (15 December 2019), including the need for ADOs to become more proactive in creating a unified vision. Specific recommendations pertaining to the themes of the conference are presented below.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- The Government of Afghanistan should implement a series of public awareness campaigns regarding the business environment and relevant policies in Afghanistan. A single website available in multiple languages would be a key starting point.
- Afghan embassies are information sources and drivers of foreign investment. The Government of Afghanistan should invest in highly skilled business attachés in embassies.
- Facilitating remittances using fair and transparent structures and fee systems is key for ensuring economic wellbeing of families and small businesses. There is a need for the Government to begin to regulate and monitor remittance channels.

## CAPACITY BUILDING

- ANDEP should clarify the benefit packages available to qualified returnees and have sufficient details on the process for applying for benefits to incentivize return of professionals.
- Embassies should play a more prominent role in tracking qualified diaspora members and ensuring job opportunities in Afghanistan are promoted to them.
- The Government could consider developing partnerships with European universities to support Afghan Research Centers focused on supporting capacity in Afghanistan.
- The widespread perception that all diaspora members are very wealthy hinders voluntary engagement of diaspora due to extortion, bribery, or corruption attempts. Additional work must be undertaken to support the voluntary sector as an important contributor to local capacity.

## ADVOCACY

- ANDEP should include a definition of advocacy to ensure clarity.
- Follow-up meetings to review ANDEP implementation progress and lessons learned will support continued diaspora engagement. This should be complemented by increased ADO engagement at high-level government meetings to ensure interests are represented.
- The diaspora and ADOs need to more effectively organize themselves (e.g., networks, umbrella organizations).
- Increased pressure on embassy officials to engage in important meetings, conferences, and events with ADOs will support mutual Afghan Government and diaspora advocacy messages.

## CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

- Cultural and social events should focus on the unique perspective and strengths of each ethnic group; the cultural diversity and richness of Afghanistan should be promoted.
- There is a need to invest in second and third generation diaspora members. This could include free language and cultural classes hosted by Afghan embassies.
- Positive messages through promotional materials, art and film in Europe should be encouraged.

## OPENING REMARKS

### **H.E. DR. ALEMA, DEPUTY MINISTER, MINISTRY FOR REFUGEES AND REPATRIATIONS, AFGHANISTAN**

The workshop began by highlighting importance of the diaspora has been of increasing concern to the Afghan government in recent years. Dr. Alema emphasized, “Considering that millions of our citizen are dispersed throughout the globe, it is appropriate and timely that Afghanistan is now attempting to build a constructive and durable partnership at a higher level.” The Afghan National Diaspora Engagement Policy (ANDEP) was introduced in preliminary draft form, which will be presented to the President of Afghanistan. The policy was noted to have a 10-year window in mind but will undergo a series of changes as the context requires. The speaker emphasised the importance of feedback from the diaspora itself in strengthening the draft policy in advance of finalization, which was the driving principle behind launching the consultation workshop. She highlighted that “The Afghan diaspora population is an integral part of our nation. Every Afghan diaspora member shall have a place where she or he will always be welcome – a place that feels like home.” The process for the day was discussed and emphasised the importance of gathering constructive feedback on the ANDEP draft. The participants were encouraged to streamline thinking into comments relevant to policy, strategy or procedures so that recommendations can be easily linked to the appropriate framework and discussed based on their relevance to each category. The participants were then collected into four working groups: economic development, capacity building, advocacy, and social and cultural development. Each group was provided a 45-minute period for discussions surrounding opportunities, challenges, and recommendations relevant to each theme. The workshop would conclude with plenary discussion on the results of each working group.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP

The group began by discussing recent successes in regard to improving the overall business environment in Afghanistan. Specifically, the Peace and Development Framework as well as clarification and streamlining of trade and investment processes in Afghanistan were identified as clear successes on the part of the Government of Afghanistan. The working group was also supportive of local initiatives, including providing support to Chambers of Commerce and industrial development parks in the 13 provinces. In terms of regional economic integration, the improvement of the air corridor was also identified as a good step. While there have been several positive developments in the last few years, security was identified as the primary challenge to sustainable economic development in Afghanistan. **Insecurity has both direct and indirect effect on the other challenges identified, including the low capacity of the private sector and overall low human capital** (e.g., education, professional skills). In terms of engaging in regional or international economic ties, Afghanistan was also identified as having **difficulty competing with regional neighbours** in regard to the quality of the manufacturing sector and quality of products produced. Lack of proactive engagement of overseas embassy staff in courting foreign investment was also identified as a barrier to improved regional and international ties. In this context, many felt the diaspora were challenged to support the economic development of Afghanistan. Participants noted that **transferring remittances to Afghanistan is difficult**, even though this is a very important mechanism for economic security and investment in small businesses for average citizens. Furthermore, the diaspora is engaged in a variety of formal and informal businesses – for those involved in informal businesses, **it is difficult to engage through regular channels and visibly contribute to economic development**. Finally, participants indicated that some members of the diaspora – particularly youth – do not have a lot of extra money but are typically highly educated. In this sense, their economic contributions to Afghanistan could come through passing on skills and knowledge rather than directly providing investment or financial assistance.

The working group developed a variety of suggestions for a way forward. Diaspora advocacy on investment in strengthening the business environment by donor governments was suggested, including the investment in facilities that would encourage business development (e.g., incubation or accelerator services). Many suggestions revolved around the theme of **proactive public awareness campaigns regarding the business environment in Afghanistan**. First, the working group suggested the government should **invest in highly skilled and proactive business attachés in Afghan embassies** to ensure that correct information is being shared with potential foreign investors. Increased professionalization of this post could also result in more favourable trade and increase the overall confidence the diaspora has in investing. The group also indicated that there was a lack of public information available about the overall economic situation and a clear guide to government policies on investment in Afghanistan. The group suggested a single **government-supported website** would be the most efficient mechanism for sharing this information. The group also indicated that the government was not proactive in tracking and providing information on remittances and diaspora investment. While consistent and consolidated record keeping could be a good first step, the working group also acknowledged that **tracking remittances** would only be feasible if the government was able to **facilitate transfers in a fair and transparent manner** – attracting diaspora members to use these services as opposed to existing private services.

# CAPACITY BUILDING WORKING GROUP

The Capacity Building component of ANDEP is focused on encouraging three areas of diaspora engagement: cooperation from qualified, retired diaspora; remote support; and facilitated professional returns. It was clarified by the group facilitator that the Capacity Building section of the policy is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs specifically. There was widespread agreement in the importance of capitalising on the potential contributions of qualified diaspora the development of Afghanistan, particularly in the health, business, and education sectors. The working group highlighted that there were several barriers to achieving both short and long-term returns of qualified diaspora to Afghanistan. As highlighted in the Afghan Diaspora in Europe Conference on 15 December, **security continues to be a major challenge** and limitation to engagement both for Afghan Diaspora Organizations (ADOs) as well as qualified individuals. The group acknowledged that there was no easy solution to this challenge, but that it should be noted as an overarching limitation to policy implementation. Beyond environmental limitations, the group identified two main categories of challenges: limited outreach and lack of sufficient benefits or incentives to qualified diaspora.

Regarding limited outreach, the working group highlighted that a more **strategic approach to identifying professionals abroad** and providing them with **targeted messaging** could be effective, though there is currently neither consistent information kept on qualified diaspora members nor on urgent needs within the country for specific qualified individuals. The group suggested that **embassies could be used as both a means to track professionals, ensure job opportunities in Afghanistan are promoted** (ACBAR was also suggested as a potential platform), provide engagement programming for younger diaspora to encourage a wish to return and support temporarily, and perhaps support internships or temporary employment opportunities for recent diaspora graduates. The working group spent significant time discussing the **lack of incentive for diaspora to return** to Afghanistan beyond an intrinsic need to support their country of origin. This raises several practical challenges that could limit the effectiveness of the policy. Specifically, the group highlighted that many Afghans in Europe are already employed in Europe and often receive much higher salaries for similar work and generally have higher standard of living. This included indirect benefits, such as pensions, health insurance, and unemployment insurance should their work end. Several participants suggested the Afghan Government provide **guaranteed minimum salaries to qualified, returned diaspora members**. Furthermore, retired professionals often are concerned about their health and wonder whether they will be able to **receive appropriate response to health issues in Afghanistan** or whether they would have acceptable insurance in Afghanistan to prevent expenses that would not exist should they remain in Europe. The group pointed out that the policy indicates a benefit package would be provided to qualified returnees, but that it did not have sufficient details or assurances that it would be delivered free of bureaucratic burden to be attractive. Diaspora organization representatives mentioned that, even after practical barriers are addressed, there are several social barriers to returning to Afghanistan to support projects or development, including stigmatisation of the diaspora as those who abandoned the country. There is also a **widespread perception that all diaspora members are very wealthy, which makes it difficult to engage with voluntary activities** and avoid extortion, bribery, or corruption attempts. Similarly, the group reported that diaspora members feel frustrated by **the lack of transparency in the hiring process of paid opportunities in Afghanistan** that may result in discrimination or corrupt practices.

Overall, the working group raised many challenges that would be difficult to solve in the immediate term – but could be initially addressed by **clarifications of and amendments to ANDEP (e.g., benefit packages, outreach strategy)**. One working group member suggested that, instead of trying to compete with Europe for qualified professionals, that the Afghan Government should consider **developing partnerships with European universities to support Research Centers focused on supporting capacity in Afghanistan**. These centers could provide valuable information and also provide outreach to diaspora and practical technical support for short- and medium-term engagement of professionals. The group suggests that this is pursued in combination with additional investment at the embassy-level for outreach and engagement.

## ADVOCACY WORKING GROUP

In identifying advocacy as a key strategic direction of ANDEP, the Government of Afghanistan is recognizing the role that diaspora members play in serving as informal ambassadors to Afghanistan. In order to best capitalize on these networks, clear communication and a specific delineation of roles and responsibilities between the Government and the diaspora is required. Upon reviewing the policy, the working group noted that **the definition of advocacy has not been included in ANDEP**, and that it was critical to ensure mutual understanding of the terms before moving the policy forward. Regardless, the group was able to move the discussion forward on a general understanding of advocacy and identify several opportunities, challenges and recommendations to move the ANDEP advocacy agenda forward.

The working group highlighted that meetings such as the Afghan Diaspora in Europe Conference and this ANDEP engagement meeting were examples of the type of ongoing communication and engagement that will be needed in order to develop coherence within the diaspora and also identify and move forward key advocacy issues. Specifically, the working group noted that there should be follow up meetings to ANDEP to update the diaspora on implementation progress, lessons learned, and to continue to identify opportunities for improved Government-diaspora engagement as the overall context in Afghanistan and for Afghans in Europe evolves. As identified in the Afghan Diaspora in Europe conference proceeding



recommendations, it is clear that **additional work is required to ensure that ADOs have sufficient opportunities to be represented at higher level meetings** between EU member states, the Afghan government, and other stakeholders (e.g., UN, INGOs) to ensure that opportunities to advocate effectively are facilitated. The working group also reiterated the recommendation that **the diaspora and ADOs need to more effectively organize themselves (e.g., networks, umbrella organizations)** to ensure that communication channels and key advocacy points are coherent across the diaspora in order to achieve the best results. Again, the group called on the need for inter-diaspora learning opportunities with diasporas who have been more effective in advocating for both diaspora and country of origin needs (e.g., Syrian, Somali).

Embassies were identified as pre-existing structures meant to provide advocacy support for Afghan interested, but participants indicated they were **disappointed with high rates of absenteeism of embassy officials at important meetings, conferences, and opportunities to engage with ADOs** directly on key advocacy issues. The working group encouraged the Afghan Government to place pressure on embassy officials to ensure that they are being proactive in their duties and engaging with the diaspora at every opportunity. They also recommended a separate channel where examples of absenteeism or lack of engagement with opportunities for advocacy meetings or conferences could be lodged in order to **increase accountability of representatives**. Some diaspora representatives indicated that the lack of ethnic diversity in some embassies limited willingness to engage in some advocacy issues or ADOs and that embassy staff should be reflective of the overall Afghan population. Finally, the working group indicated that there is **not sufficient connection between Afghan embassies and European political representatives**, especially those from the Afghan diaspora with a special interest in ensuring rights for Afghans in Europe and the development of Afghanistan in general.

## CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

Before start of the discussion, culture and society as well as the diaspora policy was explained briefly by the group leader before moving into a discussion surrounding challenges to cultural and social engagement. Most critically, the group reiterated that **divisions within the Afghan diaspora has encouraged a lack of trust and resulted in fragmentation rather than cooperation**. The group indicated that cross-generational divisions and lack of consistent engagement on culture with second and third generation diaspora members has risked cultural and linguistic loss as well as conflicting identities within these generations (i.e., Afghan versus European). Others in the working group noted that this also has a positive side: while the generational gap has encouraged overcoming some traditional ethnic and religious divisions in the community and has allowed for integration and advancement of the community. On the topic of integration, several participants noted that there is an overall negative perception of Afghanistan amongst the host community that results in discrimination and lack of respect for Afghan culture. This is sometimes validated when cultural aspects deemed not appropriate in Europe are continued by some diaspora members (e.g., early and/or forced marriage, poor treatment of animals).

Despite the scale of the challenges identified, the working group was positive in highlighting the capacity of the diaspora in Europe – including the skills and experiences brought together by a diverse range of ADOs. The group indicated that, while ethnic divisions exist, **each ethnicity has a unique perspective to add and cultural richness that should be encouraged**. There is great potential for increased cooperation and collaboration between ADOs to better represent this diversity as a key positive attribute of Afghanistan.



The group identified that both the Afghans in Europe Conference and the ANDEP were great opportunities to show the level of innovation in the community. Several recommendations focused on the proactive role that Afghan embassies could play in facilitating cultural enrichment. The working group suggested that **embassies could provide space or host free language classes for interested second and third generation diaspora** members to ensure linguistic capacities are maintained. They also indicated that embassies must be leaders in identifying qualified diaspora members to **produce their promotional material and cultural products**. This could include the use of new technologies (e.g., smartphone apps) to reach a wider audience in host countries. While there were initiatives that could be taken on by the Afghan Government, participants also acknowledged the personal responsibility diaspora members must take in cultural appreciation and preservation. Specifically, the **importance of forming a positive view of Afghan culture** with children and second-generation youth and ensuring that ADOs are actively promoting cultural enrichment.





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