



Diaspora Humanitarians

How Australia-based migrants help in crises abroad

Afghanistan Briefing

- Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, the Afghan diaspora in Australia has mobilized to provide material, economic, social and political assistance. From our survey of Afghan migrants in Australia:
 - › 72% of respondents provided financial aid.
 - › 70% volunteered or were employed as part of aid efforts.
 - › 57% engaged in advocacy in response to the crisis.
 - › 50% sponsored migration to Australia.
- In 2021, Afghanistan received US\$320 million in migrant remittances, a significant decrease from the US\$779 million received in 2020. Afghanistan’s government does not currently engage with the country’s diaspora through formal institutions.
- The Afghanistan-born population is the fifth largest migrant group from Southern and Central Asia in Australia. In 2022, an estimated 71,950 migrants born in Afghanistan resided in Australia, compared to the 2,543 Afghanistan-born residents in 2001.

Responding to Crisis

In August of 2021, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and resulting withdrawal of most foreign aid resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis. Decades of war and instability, along with a significant economic contraction meant much of the population was immediately highly vulnerable.

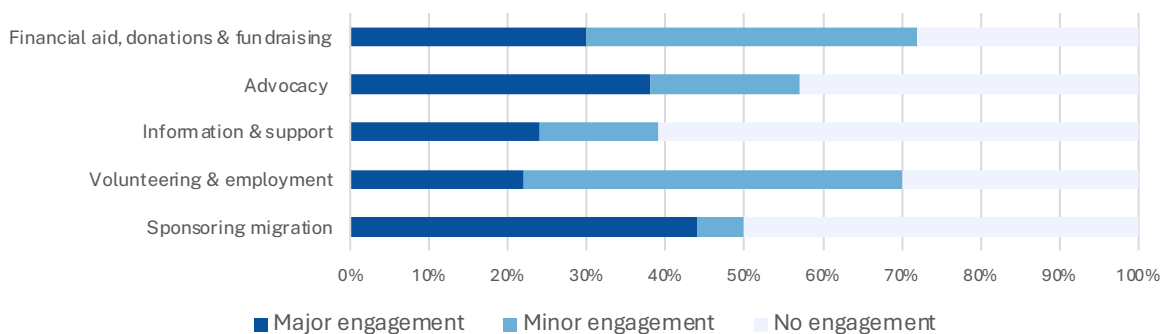
Remittances sent from the country’s diaspora have been identified as a primary reason Afghanistan’s economic situation has begun to stabilise. The United States’ decision not to sanction personal remittances sent to Afghanistan has provided the diaspora with an important means of offering humanitarian support.

Diaspora Humanitarians Survey

As part of the Diaspora Humanitarians project, members of the Afghan diaspora in Australia were surveyed about their humanitarian engagement following the crisis. 17 members of Australia’s Afghan diaspora (7 women and 10 men) responded to the survey, which asked individuals about their range of responses to the humanitarian crisis.

These actions were grouped into five categories: (1) provision of financial aid, donations or fundraising, (2) advocacy and media engagement, (3) direct communication with Afghanistan to provide support and information (4) volunteering and employment in the humanitarian sector and (5) the sponsorship of migration to Australia. Our survey relied on snowball sampling of engaged diaspora members, and provides a multi-level vision of the range of responses taken by the diaspora

Figure 1: Survey responses by the Afghan diaspora, 2022



Providing direct financial aid was the most common way to engage with the crisis, with 72% of respondents taking this action. 30% identified a major contribution, and 42% identified a minor contribution. Volunteer or paid work relating to the crisis was also common. 70% of respondents took this action: 22% indicated major engagement and 48% reported minor engagement. 57% of respondents carried out advocacy work or engaged with media following the crisis. 38% of respondents indicated significant engagement, and 19% indicated minor engagement.

Respondents provided information about migration pathways to Australia unevenly. 44% of respondents indicated major engagement, while 50% of respondents indicated no engagement. Finally, some members of the diaspora provided information or emotional support over the phone. In total, 39% of respondents indicated they had done so – with 24% indicating major engagement and 15% indicating minor engagement with this avenue of support.

Homeland Connections

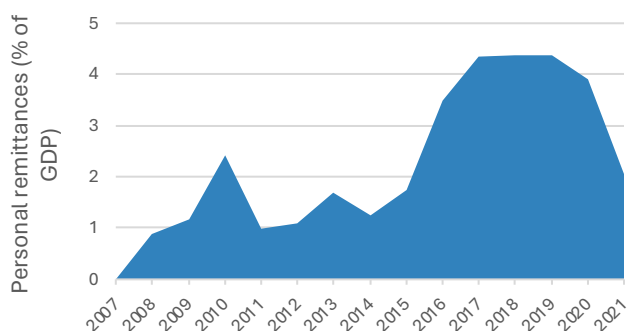
The Afghan diaspora’s humanitarian activities following the 2021 Taliban takeover were shaped by their existing connections to their homeland.

Remittances

Reported levels of personal remittances sent to Afghanistan have varied over the last two decades. Reflecting international sanctions, the World Bank did not record remittances sent to the country until 2008. Over the next nine years, the value of remittances sent to Afghanistan increased significantly, peaking at approximately US\$823 million in 2017. In 2021, value of remittances sent to the country decreased sharply: between 2020 and 2021, the percentage of Afghanistan’s GDP comprised of remittances fell from 4% to 2%. Today, the value of remittances received by Afghanistan remains lower than the pre-takeover amount.

In 2021, Australia was the 8th largest remittance-sending country to Afghanistan, with US\$5 million sent that year. Comparatively, US\$123 million was sent from Iran, US\$56 million was sent from Pakistan and US\$34 million was sent from Saudi Arabia in 2021.

Figure 2: Personal remittances as a percentage of Afghanistan’s total GDP, 2007-2022



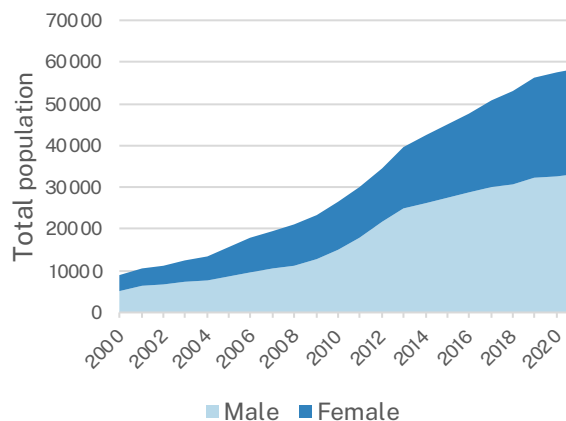
Diaspora Institutions

Between 1986 and 1990, the Office for the Return of Migrants managed issues of migration and return within government structures. In 1992, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations was established to promote the return and reintegration of Afghan refugees. However, these processes were weakened during Taliban rule in the 1990s. The Ministry was first downgraded to a directorate, then was incorporated into the Taliban’s Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs. Following the Taliban’s fall in 2001, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations was re-established. It provided assistance and supported the livelihoods of returnees. In 2006 this ministry was incorporated into the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, which dealt with diaspora affairs until 2015.

The Australia-Based Diaspora

The humanitarian responses of Australia’s Afghan diaspora have been shaped by migrants’ continuing connections to their homeland, by their dynamics of migration, and by their experiences of settlement in Australia.

Figure 3: Total Afghanistan-born population in Australia, 2000-2021



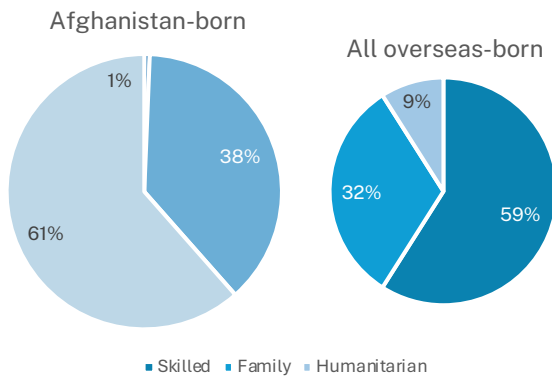
Dynamics of Migration

In 2022, Australia’s population included an estimated 71,950 migrants born in Afghanistan. Since the 2021 Australian Census, more than 12,000 Afghan-born individuals have settled in Australia. Many of these migrants were likely Afghan citizens eligible for humanitarian visas due to their employment by the Australian Government in Afghanistan.

Migration from Afghanistan to Australia began in the 1980s. Until 2000, the rate of male and female migration to Australia was gender-balanced. Since then, a greater number of men have migrated to Australia. In 2021, 56.7% of the Afghanistan-born population in Australia were male and 43.3% were female. The Afghan population in Australia has grown significantly since 2000, when only 12,580 Afghanistan-born migrants resided in the country.

The Afghanistan-born population experiences a variety of migration pathways. In 2021, 55% of Australia's Afghanistan-born migrants were citizens and 49,858 individuals were in Australia's permanent migrant program. Most permanent migrants (62%) were in the humanitarian visa stream. 1% were in the skilled visa stream and 37% were in the family visa stream.

Figure 4: Afghanistan and all overseas-born permanent residents in Australia, 2021



Comparatively, 5,375 Afghanistan-born individuals held temporary Australian visas in 2021. Of this cohort, 26 people held temporary skilled visas, 56 people held student visas and 4,768 people held other temporary visas. There were 505 New Zealand citizens born in Afghanistan on the Special Category Visa, indicating step migration across the Tasman to Australia.

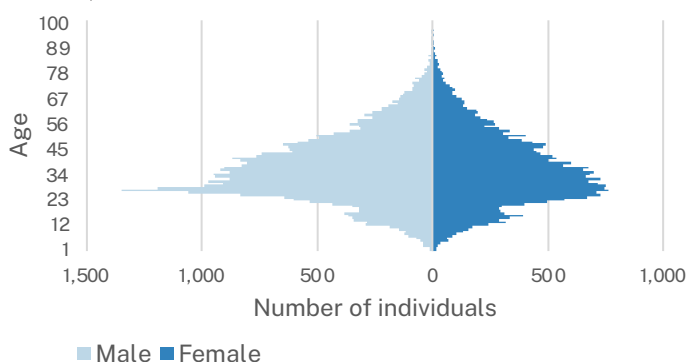
Population Dynamics

The population dynamics of the Afghan diaspora in Australia reflect the predominant flow of humanitarian migration from the country. Compared to the total Australian population, the diaspora is young, majority male and concentrated in Greater Melbourne.

Demography

As of 2021, the median age of Afghanistan-born migrants in Australia was 34, below the national average of 38 and overseas born average of 45. Afghanistan-born migrants between 15 and 39 constituted 57% of the total population, whereas just 8% were aged 60 and above. Particularly among younger age cohorts, significantly more male than female Afghanistan-born individuals live in Australia.

Figure 5: Population pyramid for the Afghanistan-born population in Australia, 2021

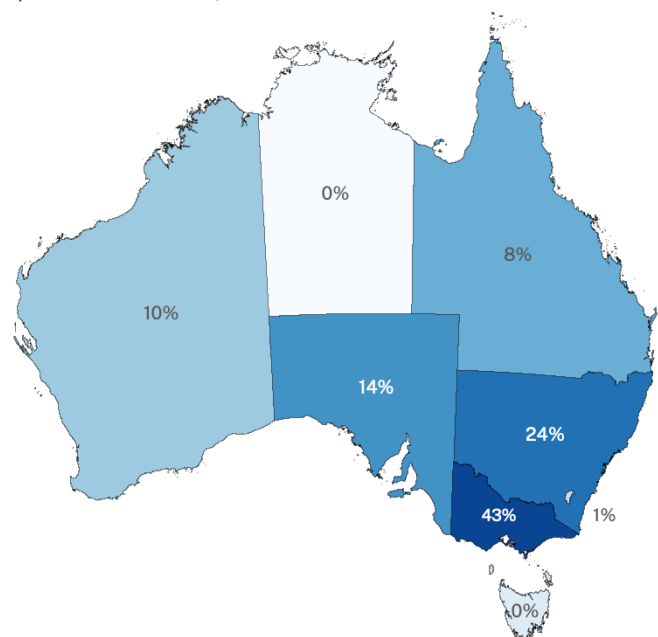


As the Afghan diaspora in Australia has consolidated, the number of second and third generation Australians has increased. In 2021, 27,140 Australian-born people had at least one Afghanistan-born parent. Of this cohort, 20,743 individuals had two parents born in Afghanistan, 1,533 had one Afghanistan and one Australian-born parent and 4,864 had one Afghanistan and one other overseas-born parent. Additionally, 25,817 individuals born in Australia identified as having Afghan (16,517 people), Hazara (8,231 people) or Pathan (1,069 people) ancestry.

Geography

Only 6% of the Afghan diaspora reside outside of Australia's capital cities. In 2021, 39% of Australia's Afghanistan-born population resided in Greater Melbourne, 23% resided in Greater Sydney and 13% resided in Greater Adelaide. Comparatively, 19% of Australia's entire population resided in Greater Melbourne, 21% resided in Greater Sydney and 5% resided in Greater Adelaide.

Figure 6: Geographies of residence of the Afghanistan-born population in Australia, 2021



Education

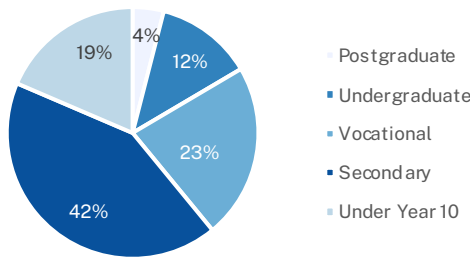
The vast majority of the Afghan diaspora aged 15 and above in Australia have completed secondary education (81%). Additionally, 23% of the diaspora have vocational qualifications and 17% are university educated (13% of the population have a bachelor's degree, while 4% have postgraduate qualifications).

Education levels within the diaspora vary slightly by gender. While the same proportion of men and women have postgraduate, vocational and secondary levels of education, a higher proportion of women have

an undergraduate degree compared to men (14% of women compared to 11% of men), and a slightly lower proportion of women finished their education below a year-10 level than men (19% of women compared to 17% of men).

Compared to the total Australian population, the Afghan diaspora has had less access to university education. The proportion of individuals with secondary school or vocational qualifications as their highest level of educational attainment is similar to the Australian

Figure 7: Highest level of educational achievement of the Afghanistan-born population in Australia, 2021



Economic Activity

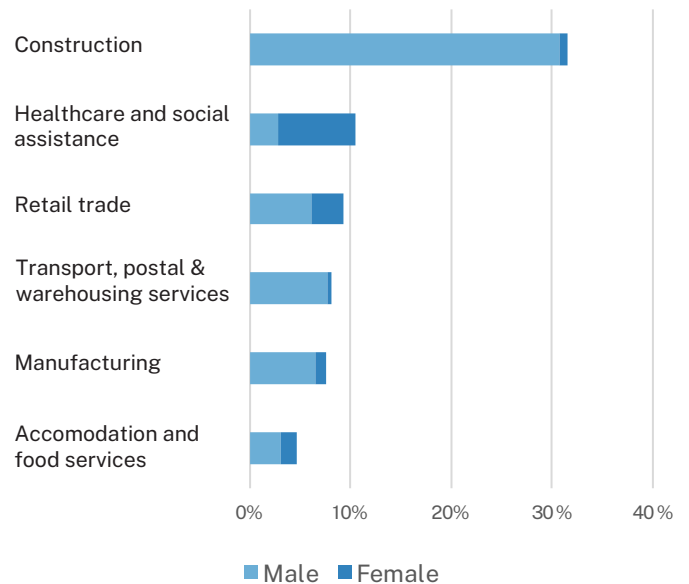
In Australia, the most popular sector of employment for Afghanistan-born migrants is overwhelmingly construction, with 32% of those in the labour market working in this sector. Other significant sectors of employment include healthcare (10%), retail (9%), transport, postal and warehousing services (9%) and manufacturing (8%).

The diaspora’s employment dynamics are gendered. 77% of the working population is male, whereas 23% is female. In 2021, 40% of employed Afghanistan-born men worked in the construction industry, 10% worked in transport, postal and warehousing services and

9% worked in manufacturing. Comparatively, 33% of employed women worked in healthcare, 13% worked in retail and 10% were employed in the education sector.

Relative to the total Australian workforce, a significant proportion of the diaspora is employed in the construction industry (9% of Australia’s working population, 32% of the diaspora’s) and in the transport, postal and warehousing industry (5% of Australia’s working population 9% of the diaspora’s). Comparatively, a lower percentage of the diaspora works in the healthcare sector compared the Australian average (15% of Australia’s working population, 10% of the Afghanistan-born workforce).

Figure 8: Leading sectors of employment for the Afghanistan-born population in Australia, 2021



Sources:

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022a), Census of Population and Housing, 2021; Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022b), Permanent Migrants in Australia; Australian Department of Home Affairs (2024a), Permanent Migration Program (Skilled & Family) Outcomes Snapshot – Annual Statistics; Australian Department of Home Affairs (2024b), Temporary visa holders in Australia; The World Bank (2022a), Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) Remittances Data; The World Bank (2022b), Personal remittances, received (% of GDP); Akmal Dawi, “Humanitarian Needs in Afghanistan Improve Slightly, Millions in Crisis,” Voice of America News, March 25, 2024.

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This research is partially supported by the Australian Government through the ARC’s Linkage Projects funding scheme (project LP200200817). The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Australian Government or the ARC.



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The Diaspora Humanitarians project aims to map the extensive humanitarian activities and contributions of Australia-based migrants to crises abroad. For more information see www.diasporahumanitarians.com