

Afghan Displacement, Diaspora(s) and Knowledge Networks:
Intergenerational Connections and Futures Working Paper Series

Introduction and Executive Summary

This collection of reports focuses on the impact of war, violence and displacement on the higher education system in Afghanistan, alongside the resulting impact on knowledge networks and the future of Afghanistan more generally. Within these reports, the authors also explore how and where Afghans continue to transmit knowledge in ways that aim to preserve the collective knowledge (broadly defined) of the Afghan people. With the 2021 takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban regime, a great deal of knowledge production and transmission now takes place in diasporic communities around the world. The authors of this working paper series all contribute to our understanding of these processes, providing both concrete data alongside conceptual and analytical framings of the complex relationship between the displacement of Afghans, their emplacement and work in diasporic communities and the implications for knowledge networks historically, currently and into the future.

In the first working paper ‘The Afghan Crisis, Higher Education and Female’s Access to Higher Education’ Ali Kaveh begins by providing readers with an overview of the history of Afghanistan and the multiple conflicts it has witnessed in its history. This historical review is accompanied by a discussion of the history of higher education in the country, which includes a discussion of how political changes have and continue to impact this sector and social development in Afghanistan. Particular attention is paid to the impacts of these processes on the women’s education in Afghanistan. In his second contribution to the working paper series, Ali Kaveh’s paper ‘Afghan Diaspora Associations and Networks’, readers are provided with a detailed overview of international migration patterns of Afghan nationals, both historically and up until 2024. Literature on the contributions of diasporic communities to their home countries and peoples is considered, alongside a discussion of what is currently known about Afghan diasporic communities in western countries generally and Canada more specifically. Where possible, the author links these communities and their organization in the diaspora to the impact on and experiences of scholars and students from Afghanistan.

In the penultimate paper of this series, Maryam Begzada undertakes a spatial analysis of Afghan Knowledge Networks. Her paper ‘Strengthening Afghan Diaspora Knowledge Networks Worldwide: Insights from Digital, Physical and Psychological Spaces’ engages with the literature on knowledge networks more generally, exploring the different types of knowledge transmission that occur in virtual/online spaces versus in-person/physical spaces—and how the psychological facets of both these spaces have an impact on those working within the networks. The author explores the implications of this for Afghan Knowledge Networks, with a review of some of the nodes of these networks as they currently exist, and policy options for improving the network. Finally, in ‘Addressing the Political Disruptions to the Afghan Scholarly Knowledge Systems: The Developmental Role and Implications of Diaspora Knowledge Networks’ Shahla Gulistani provides a critical analysis of Afghan scholarly knowledge systems and networks. This final paper asks the reader to reflect on wider issues of power as they relate to knowledge production (both generally and in relation to Afghanistan specifically). Incorporating critical literatures, including post-colonial thought, the author considers the variety of forces which shape our understanding of *what knowledge is* and thus how knowledge systems are created and transformed. While offering a critical and cautious assessment of diasporic knowledge networks, the paper includes a hopeful analysis as well, noting that ‘[b]y leveraging DKNs, the Afghan scholarly community can benefit from the preservation of local knowledge, the integration of global best practices, and the enhancement of academic standards and research capacity. These networks offer

opportunities for collaborative research, digital transformation, and policy advocacy, all of which can contribute to the resilience and development of Afghanistan's scholarly knowledge systems' (Gulistani: 2024: 30).

Through this working paper series, the reader will learn about the interconnectedness of politics, migration and the sharing of knowledge as it relates to Afghanistan and its people. Though largely focused on the serious and negative impacts of violence on knowledge networks, within these contributions readers will also find analyses which document practical responses to such disruption and hopefully invite future policy interventions to protect Afghan knowledge networks moving forward. We invite readers to also consider where this research has ended and what further research now needs to be taken up by the academic community to further our understanding of the incredible disruption to Afghan knowledge networks that we have seen and the solutions that will ensure the ongoing preservation and transfer of learning both within and between generations of scholars.

Scholars and Students from Afghanistan--Displacement, Emplacement and Supports: An Anthology
Intergenerational Connections and Futures-Afghanistan

Introduction and Executive Summary

This collection comprises a series of contributions that, whilst diverse in format, provide insight into the experiences of displacement by Afghan scholars and students, their emplacement/resettlement abroad as well as the nature of supports available through these experiences. What unites this diverse set of resources is a need to consider what one author refers to as 'the whole of a person' approach—the need to understand social, cultural, political, financial, psychological and spiritual facets in our understanding and analysis of the above. Also uniting the pieces in this collection is a focus on the individual and the agency of displaced scholars and students; whilst understanding general trends within Afghan scholarly displacement and resettlement is essential, the works in this anthology ask us to not lose sight of the individual and diverse experiences (and needs) of those who have experienced displacement.

With this in mind, the first contribution to the anthology, Shogofa Alizada's annotated bibliography 'Mapping the Migration, Settlement, Education and Higher Education Prospects of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Minors in Canada' challenges us to consider the displacement and resettlement of a very specific and incredibly at risk group—unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs). Whilst this group is not directly displaced from higher education systems in Afghanistan, their academic goals to study and excel at this level in the future are impacted by the unique experience of having fled Afghanistan on their own and maneuvering their new 'homes' as minors. Finding a lack of literature on Afghan URMs in relation to accessing Canadian higher education specifically, this annotated bibliography collects and assesses research that will nonetheless help us understand and address the needs of this particular group of displaced persons as we seek to improve access to higher education for this group. The work creates a framework that 'helps reveal how historical injustices and ongoing power imbalances continue to influence the educational pathways and opportunities available to URMs' noting for example how 'by understanding the lingering effects of colonialism and imperialism, we can better comprehend the systemic issues that perpetuate inequality and hinder the success of URMs in higher education' (Alizada, 2024: 50).

The second contribution to this anthology follows on from the above conclusion, assessing the critical scholarship and what it offers us in terms of understanding the wider, identity-based elements of scholarly displacement and resettlement. In her annotated bibliography 'Academic Belonging in the Shadow of Colonialism—Afghan Scholars' Struggle for Identity and Integration' Aida Sanjush draws on post-colonial readings as a way of moving us towards answering the following questions: How do colonial narratives influence the identity and academic integration of Afghan scholars in Western academia? And what role does the preservation of Afghan intellectual heritage play in the global academic community, and how can it be supported?. While finding a general lack of research in relation to the resettlement of Afghan scholars and students in Canada, the author draws on a range of related resources, highlighting the importance of acquiring a deeper understanding on the impact of displacement and emplacement on the identity of scholars. Both the personal and professional identities of Afghan scholars and students is impacted through the process of scholarly resettlement, and as this work argues, it is essential these are understood as we aim to support their work in Canadian higher education systems.

The final set of contributions to this anthology comes from Shogofa Alizada's searchable spreadsheet, 'Mapping Support Services at Canadian Universities Affiliated with Scholars at Risk' and her 'Executive Summary: Understanding Trends in Canadian Higher Education Support Programs for Displaced Persons'. In the former of these, the author provides details of support programs offered at Canadian higher education institutions for students who have experienced displacement, including but not limited to those from Afghanistan. Through this mapping, readers, particularly those working in Canadian higher education and whose job includes mandates to support such students, are provided with an overview of different types of programs that exist. From this it is hoped that new ideas and programs might be considered, and that stakeholders might also seek each other out to learn from one another. Accompanying the map of support programs is a brief analysis and Executive Summary of the programs identified. Though not a full analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of individual programming, the author does identify some trends when looking at programming as a whole. It is noted that the majority of programming is fragmented and decentralized (with displaced students likely having to access supports through multiple units). Likewise, in general (with some notable exceptions such as the World University Service of Canada- Student Refugee Program) many programs are reactionary and temporary in nature, meaning that initiatives are launched in response to certain crisis and often in the short term (despite many crises turning into more chronic situations). Finally, the author explores concerns over systemic racism or discrimination, with students from some conflict affected zones receiving more support than others. Within this document, concrete ideas for improving how universities and colleges can better respond to scholarly displacement can be considered.