

Journeys

A woman with short, curly blonde hair is smiling. She is wearing a purple tunic with intricate, colorful embroidery in red, green, and gold around the neckline and sleeves. She also wears a leopard-print headscarf with a tan-colored tie at the front. Her glasses have a blue frame. The background is a dark, textured blue.

Stories from the Afghan
Community in Scotland

“

*I left
Afghanistan
to save my
life”*

Khatera Siddiqi



INTRODUCTION

This booklet accompanies the exhibition titled 'Journeys: stories from the Afghan Community in Scotland.' It explores the experiences of people from Afghanistan who have made their home in Scotland.

In the exhibition there are 35 portraits from residents of Glasgow and other parts of Scotland, representing the diversity of the Afghan community.

Everyone shown here is in a process of building a new life in Scotland. They all have a deeper story to tell; from having to leave their home country, travelling across the world, and starting a new life in a different but welcoming place. There are many challenges from learning English, finding work, making friends, bringing up their family, to maintaining their culture whilst becoming new Scots.

The exhibition and booklet are presented by Glasgow Afghan United. It was founded in 2004 to 'promote the values of unity, equality, pace and diversity in Scotland by supporting the Afghan community and other diverse ethnic minority groups.'

Glasgow Afghan United believes that everyone should have the chance to achieve their potential, regardless of their background. It's mission is to connect people, build stronger communities and better lives through cultural celebrations, social events, and other activities. They work to support the full participation of New Scots in all aspects of civil society.

Acknowledgement

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“

*Since moving
to Scotland
I can see my
future”*

Ahnad Khalid Mohannadi



BACKGROUND TO AFGHANISTAN

“I’m attached to Afghanistan; my heart is there”

Ahmad Kambiz Raofi

Geography: Afghanistan is the world’s 41st largest country (slightly larger than France). It has international borders with Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China. **Population:** The population of Afghanistan is estimated to be around 38m. By comparison the UK population is 67m, of which 5.5m live in Scotland. Most of Afghanistan is rural containing around %75 of the population. The remaining %25 of the population live in urban areas. The largest being the capital Kabul with a metropolitan population of 4.3m This compares to the metropolitan area of Glasgow with a population of 1.6m, and London 9.5m. Life expectancy is estimated to average 65 years (for Scotland, life expectancy is 76 years for men and 80 years for women).

Ethnicity: Pashtuns %39 (in south and east), Tajiks %37 (north and west). Significant minorities include Hazaras and Uzbeks.

Religion: In Afghanistan %99 of the population follow the Muslim religion. The majority are Sunni followers, with Shia followers estimated around %15- 10.

Languages: Dari (also known as Farsi) is spoken by %78 (mainly Tajiks), and Pashto by %50 (mainly Pashtuns). Many people speak both languages.

Economy: Although Afghanistan is potentially a wealthy country, with an estimated 1\$ trillion in mineral deposits, its economic

and social development has been held back by decades of political instability (see the following timeline). The current GDP per capita is estimated by the World Bank to be around 500\$. Many of the country's basic services have been supported in recent years by international aid. Since the Taliban returned to power, much of this external support has been cut.

Refugees: Due to the decades of instability and civil war, it is estimated that %75 of Afghans have been internally and / or externally displaced at some point during their life. In the last 20 years 1.4m refugees have moved to the neighbouring countries of Pakistan, and 780,00 to Iran.

AFGHANISTAN – RECENT TIMELINE

“You can’t understand people’s pain unless you stand in their shoes”

Ahmad Kambiz Raofi

1973 The Monarchy was overthrown in a military coup. The People’s Democratic Party comes to power and the Republic of Afghanistan is established. The new government is supported by the USSR.

1978 A Communist Party coup takes power and kills leader of the PDP. It is opposed by conservative Islamic and ethnic leaders. The Mujahadeen guerrilla movement is formed to fight the government.

1979 USSR invades Afghanistan to support the communist government.

1982 Due to the war 2.8m Afghans have fled to Pakistan and 1.5m to Iran. Al-Qaida is formed as part of the fight against the Soviets.

1989 Afghanistan, USSR, US, and Pakistan sign a peace treaty. USSR withdraws its troops.

1992 Mujahadeen take Kabul, with a civil war developing amongst rival factions.

1995 Taliban take power and promise to restore peace and traditional Islamic values. There is continued resistance from the Northern Alliance. The Taliban restrict the education and jobs for women, who are instructed to be veiled and to stay at home unless accompanied by a male relative.

2001 US and Western troops invade in response to the Al-Qaida 11/9 attacks in New York. The Taliban is driven from power.

2002 The Loya Jirga (Great Council) elects Hamid Karzai as President

2003 Fighting with the Taliban continues, and NATO takes over security in Kabul

2004 The Loya Jirga adopts a new democratic constitution (which also promotes equality for women).

2005 First parliamentary elections in Afghanistan for 30 years

2006 Ongoing fighting between NATO troops and Taliban

2013 Afghan Army takes over security operations from NATO

2014 President Obama announces US troop reductions. NATO ends combat mission in Afghanistan

2019 US and Taliban sign peace treaty. US withdrawal planned for May 2021

2021 Western troops leave Afghanistan. Afghan government collapses as the Taliban advance – Taliban take power in August 2021

(ref: PBS.ORG)



LIFE IN AFGHANISTAN

As can be seen in the above timeline, life in Afghanistan has been very difficult for at least the past 50 years. There are many deep-seated differences in the country based around identity, status, and beliefs.

One of the key differences is the division of the population between the Pashtuns who tend to live in the south and east (bordering Pakistan) who speak Pashto, and Tajiks living in the north and west (bordering Iran) who speak Farsi. There are also many ethnic minority communities. In particular, the Hazara represent around %18 of the population who are mainly Shia, rather than Suni Muslims, and approximately 2 million Uzbeks. The majority of the Taliban are Pashtuns.

The rural / urban divide is also significant. The rural heartland tends to be very conservative, with traditional views around the roles of men and women underpinned by religious practice. By contrast the urban areas, particularly Kabul, could be considered more 'modern' with some western cultural influences. These cultural differences play out through how people dress, socialise, make a living, and enjoy music and entertainment. The equality of women is a key factor; many urban women believe they have a right to a full education, the right to work and to make their own life decisions. In contrast

hardline conservatives can be opposed to women's education and employment, with many men believing that women should not be outside of their home without being accompanied by a male relative. This ideological position is based upon an

interpretation of Sharia Law rooted in a fundamental and militant view of Islam.

The new constitution that was adopted in 2004 was an attempt to establish a form of a functioning democracy where the above challenges could be worked through allowing development to take place across the country. However, the Taliban never accepted the legitimacy of the government and continued to wage a guerrilla war against the Afghan Government and foreign forces.

As we have noted, the effect of the ongoing war has led to many Afghans being displaced internally or externally during their life. In 2020 it was estimated there were in excess of 2 million Afghans living as refugees in Pakistan and Iran. With the collapse of the Afghan Government in 2021 this situation has become worse. The economy has collapsed, and the majority of women have been banned from work and education. The result has been deepening poverty and food insecurity.

The UNHCR' 2021 Global Report estimated that as a result of the 2021 takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban, refugees and asylum seeker numbers had increased to 2.3 million. 25% of this number were women and 48% children. The number of internally displaced people increased to 3.5 million of which 58% were children.

“

*I want my sister to
come to the UK...
life is so hard in
Afghanistan....
Wider families
cannot get a visa”*

Zakia Fazenpu



COMING TO THE UK

The experience of becoming a refugee, being forced to leave your home and country should not be underestimated.

The journeys to the UK from Afghanistan can take many forms. For example, for a few it was a military flight from Kabul airport. Once the plane is in the air you know that you are safe. It may be living in a refugee camp in Pakistan and getting a visa to the UK – this can be a more complex, stressful, and time-consuming experience that we might think. Many years may pass before the process can be completed.

From our interviews, we know that it may involve living in various countries until you finally find safety and stability. For example, believing that you are building a new life in Ukraine only to find yourself caught up in another war. Or living with relatives in a European country only to find they are being displaced and having to move on. It may be that as a child you left your family home with a family member (older brother, uncle, etc) to find safety and a future, and through no fault of yours ending up in a refugee camp (in one case a military prison!). It could be that a family moves together, but in the chaos of fleeing you become separated and end up on your own in strange country, vulnerable and afraid.

The Refugee Health Technical Assistance Centre, commenting on the refugee experience suggests that:

“Before being forced to flee, refugees may experience imprisonment, torture, loss of property, malnutrition, physical assault, extreme fear, rape, and loss of livelihood. The flight process can last days or

years. During flight, refugees are frequently separated from family members, robbed, forced to inflict pain, or kill, witness torture or killing, and/or lose close family members or friends and endure extremely harsh environmental conditions.

Perhaps the most significant effect from all of the experience's refugees endure is having been betrayed, either by their own people, by enemy forces, or by the politics of their world in general. Having misanthropic actions of others being a major factor controlling the lives of refugees has significant implications for health and for their ability to develop trusting interpersonal relationships, which are critical to resettlement and healing."

Once you have arrived in the UK, have somewhere to live, and begin to feel safe and start thinking about building a positive future in your new country, there are still anxieties that do not go away. You probably have family and close friends still in Afghanistan. Are they safe, do

they have any money, enough food? Are you in contact with them by phone, or is contact lost? Are they also trying to leave the country? Are they in hiding from the Taliban and fearing for their lives. For many of the people we interviewed these are continuing concerns. How do you build a life if every day you wonder if your parents are still alive?

As we have noted above, the Office for National Statistics estimates there are around 79,000 people who were born in Afghanistan living in the UK. Some has come to the UK under various visa programmes, many arrived after the first Taliban rule and have been here for around 20 years. They will have right to remain, many are now British citizens, and the numbers will include the family members of refugees.

“

*I am a British Citizen....
I have been 20 years
away from my parents,
they are elderly, and
their lives are at risk, but
I can't even get a visa for
them to visit”*

Ahmad Kambiz
Raofi



THE UK ASYLUM PROCESS

The response of the British Government to the current crisis in Afghanistan has been to establish three programmes.

Operation Pitting was a military led evacuation programme in August 2021 for British Citizens and some Afghan nationals. In particular, those who had relatives in the UK, those who had been employed by the UK Government in Afghanistan (e.g. military interpreters), and others at risk from the Taliban. People evacuated under this scheme will be granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK.

The Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) was launched in January 2022 and has a target of resettling 20,000 people in the UK. It will include refugees from Afghanistan referred by UNHCR.

The ex-gratia and ARAP schemes for former employees is a scheme for those who worked for the British Government in Afghanistan (plus family members), who are at risk from Taliban reprisals.

In addition, there are other immigration routes including reuniting families through applying for a visa in a third- party country. Also, Afghans arriving in the UK can apply for asylum. The current Home Office policy suggests that asylum will be granted to those likely to be at risk from the Taliban. However, a failed asylum claim (of an Afghan citizen) does not currently lead to enforced removal from the UK.

THE UK ASYLUM RULES state that to stay in the UK an asylum applicant needs to be granted Refugee status. For this to happen you need to demonstrate that you are unable to live safely in any part of your own country because of persecution.

Persecution is defined as ill treatment because of; race, religion, nationality, political opinion, and other factors including gender and sexual orientation. In 2021 the approval rate for all UK Asylum claims was %72, which represents a significant increase over previous years.

The Home Office states that Asylum claims will be processed, and a decision made within 6 months. However, claimants can wait over a year for a decision. At the time of writing (November %96 (2022 of claimants who arrived in the UK by boat from France in 2021 had not received a decision on their claim. The delay is caused by staffing and operational issues in the Home Office, and some claimants have waited 3 years for a decision. Such a long delay in having an asylum application decided can

be very stressful with the claimant effectively living in limbo for an unknown length of time.

If a claimant is granted refugee status, they can be classified as a Group 1 or Group 2 refugee.

A Group 1 refugees has demonstrated that they: came from a country where their life or freedom was threatened, made an asylum claim without delay after arrival in the UK, and the Home Office accepts the reason for any illegal entry to the UK. Group 2 refugees fail to meet at least one of these conditions.

GROUP 1 STATUS means that the refugee has ‘permission to stay’ in the UK for a minimum of 5 years. After 5 years a refugee can apply for ‘indefinite leave to remain in the UK’. This status enables the person to live, work, study and apply for benefits in the UK. They can also apply for British Citizenship.

GROUP 2 STATUS gives permission to stay in the UK for a minimum of 30 months. This ‘temporary refugee permission to stay’ enables the refugee after 10 years to apply to settle in the UK under the long-term residency rules.

DEPENDENTS OF GROUP 1 refugees can settle in the UK as a family after 5 years. Family of Group 2 refugees can settle in the UK after 10 years.

HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION rules may enable people to stay in the UK even if their Asylum claim is rejected.

Normally, if an asylum claim is unsuccessful, the claimant will be asked to leave the UK, either by their own action (for which support is available) or be forced to leave. In the latter case they will have a warning letter in advance of removal. There is an appeal process for unsuccessful asylum claims. This process of removal is not currently being applied to Afghan claimants.

CURRENT POSITION OF RECENT AFGHAN REFUGEES TO THE UK

In response to the most recent crisis in Afghanistan, 11,300* Afghans have been granted Leave to Remain in the UK since April 2021.

Under the current UK Government visa schemes**, Afghans fleeing the Taliban continue to be eligible to make new lives in the UK.

* Correct as of August 2022 – Gov.UK

**Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)
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Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)
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“

*Life in Glasgow
is exciting, like
a dream, peace,
paradise”*

Abdul Rastagar

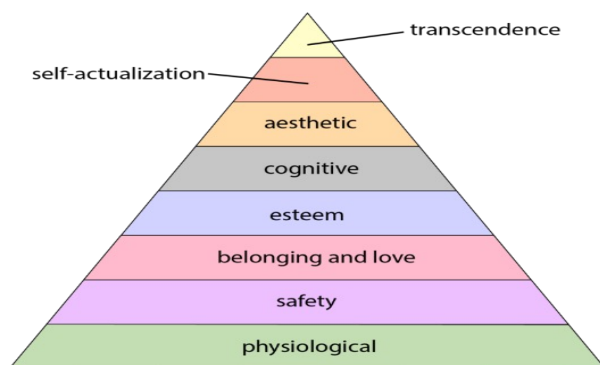


GLASGOW

Afghan refugees' experience of Glasgow varies dramatically depending on how long they have lived here, their gender, their employment status and their existing family and social networks. Overall, the picture is very positive but, of course, there are issues which need to be tackled and things that could be improved.

HOUSING

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1943) suggests that a number of needs must be met in order for people to be fully functioning members of society and to reach their full potential. The lowest levels of the pyramid are Physiological needs which includes food, water, clothing and shelter, and Safety; it is these that we will initial consider.



Most of the people we talked with had a good first experience of Glasgow in terms of Physiological needs. On arrival in Glasgow, most were met by case workers and taken to housing which would be their long-term home, rather than temporary accommodation, allowing them to quickly get established in the city.

Despite these generally high levels of satisfaction, it was highlighted that it was difficult to secure accommodation for larger families. This resulted in some families experiencing overcrowding, having to rely on friends and families or make other arrangements.

However, once established, their experience of the city has broadly been a good one. One person said, *“living in Scotland is like living in paradise ... you can do anything you want if you make it happen...most Scottish people don't understand this”*. But it has not always been this paradise. As another person reports, “Glasgow has got better over 20 years. Was in Royston for time – boys carrying knives, gang fights. Street crime. Racism was there...but I’ve had no problems since moving to Anderston” This perhaps reflects changes in societal and community attitudes, a process supported by a number of organisations across the city, such as Glasgow Afghan United, local community groups, education projects and integration networks and of course the normal processes of living, working and learning together. However, despite the good experiences and progress made, it was reported that Glasgow has something of an image problem. Having experienced a very pleasant reality, people felt that there was a need to advise incomers of the truth about Scotland and not allow rumours of bad weather, junkies (sic), violence, etc put people off coming to Scotland.

Though most of the families we spoke to live in Glasgow, the positive experience was echoed by a couple who lived in Edinburgh, who said Edinburgh people were welcoming, and were very supportive. They felt that Scottish people were similar to Afghans (hospitable and warm, smiling) and appreciated the beautiful architecture and impressive townscape.



FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS

Glasgow prides itself on being a friendly city, indeed this perception is supported by a poll in 2021 (Rough Guide) where it was voted the world's friendliest city. This view was also widely supported through the interviews where people variously described:

- Everyone friendly in Glasgow
- Made friends with supportive and nice people
- Life in Glasgow exciting, like a dream, peace, paradise
- Glasgow better for incomers than other parts of UK
- Happy, love Glasgow, not too busy, not rushing around, people lovely, helpful
- Found Glasgow people similar to those in Afghanistan, 'it's nice to be nice'

There were many stories about neighbours who would help by giving local information, being a listening ear, giving practical support or just by being friendly. In some cases, these people have developed into important family friends. One man said, *"Enjoy every moment in Glasgow: Glasgow people not racist, humanity, very green place"*. On the other hand, a few people had difficulty confronting the high levels of alcohol abuse and addictions that they saw on the streets.

NAVIGATING THE CITY

Navigating geographically and socially in a new city is complex and can, at times, be overwhelming. The people we spoke to demonstrated great resourcefulness and resilience in this process. One common way of getting to know the city was by walking, which gave people a sense of place and scale, identifying essential resources such as shops, schools, parks, and community centres. Public transport was similarly important in exploring the city, particularly the city centre and the many resources that exist there.

Over recent years, the Afghanis and others who have become established in the community are able to share their local knowledge to help new arrivals. This is an important source of support and information, where it is available. By contrast, in contexts where people were the only Afghan family in the neighbourhood, levels of difficulty and anxiety are much higher. Another valuable resource cited by several people, particularly the younger ones, was the use of smart phones and the internet through which they were able to navigate and to understand the cultural context better. This might be an area of development which could be usefully explored.

Generally, people said that they felt well integrated into Scotland, comfortable and welcome and found people to be respectful and helpful. But this should not blind us to the fact that many are still working through the traumas from home and journeying the Glasgow, as one man said, *“I still wake up at night scared of what might happen”*.

In order to make their way in this new world, people said we “needed support about everything” (speaking better English, letters, systems, money, shopping, etc) Glasgow Afghan United and British Red Cross were mentioned as being very helpful in these matters.

There was much discussion about policies of the dispersal of refugees. Whilst a minority acknowledged that in the past large groups of refugees in one location proved to be a barrier to integration, people overwhelmingly stressed the importance of having access to people in the same situation as a source of invaluable support. The preference was for families to be housed in bigger cities where there is access to specialized services, appropriate food shops and places of worship. It was recognised that on some occasions people might have to be placed in smaller towns. Where this is the case, the plea is that these should be groups of 5 to 10 families which would help solve that problem of isolation and provide support, but still facilitate integration with the wider community. Additionally, projects are required to link up dispersed communities with community hubs in the big cities.



GENDER ISSUES

Gender has a major influence on how this process of becoming established in a new city works. Women are often isolated and depressed when they arrive, and some are very damaged by their life experiences. One woman told us that she “*cried everyday*”, because she was so isolated until she made contact with Glasgow Afghan United, “*I found support, help and friendship but that was four months later.*” Others felt that, although the community group they were part of offered them a space to work through this anxiety and some past traumas, there was a need for specialist services to work through issues they were dealing with. Research echoes this finding suggesting that refugees and asylum seekers have high and persistent rates of PTSD, depression, anxiety, and psychosis and highlight the need for ongoing, long-term mental health care beyond the initial period of resettlement (Blackmore et al 2020).

A common experience for the women was that initially they were mainly at home, often with children and missing their families back in Afghanistan. Frequently, their husbands would be out meeting people, learning about the area, and possibly working. They would then introduce their wives to what they had learned, but that initial period was very isolating and difficult.

One of the main ways that women begin to connect with people and regain their active life is through education. All the women we spoke with discussed how important it was to learn English and most felt the services provided for them in this respect was excellent and that classes were easy to access. The additional benefit of being able to socialise with others both within and outwith the classes was considered to be very helpful. Education

for employment was also mentioned as being both available and useful. We will discuss this in greater detail in a later chapter.

Some of the women had husbands who were very supportive of them going out to work. Where this was the case, it was found to be a helpful, enriching experience. One woman's advice to fellow newcomers was, "*don't isolate yourself, engage with society... GAU helps to do this*".



SUPPORT GROUPS

So, as we have seen people explore, navigate, and integrate into their new city by drawing on their own resources, developing friendships, and making the most of the opportunities to socialise, work, and learn. However, all of this self-effort is amplified when supported by the work of the various voluntary organisations who work directly with refugees and asylum seekers as well as facilitating connections between them and the host community (see for example Glasgow City Council 2022). We will have more to say about this in later chapters, but we will introduce some of the organisations that were mentioned in the interviews.

Some received help back into employment from the Bridges Programme, a specialist agency, supporting the social, educational, and economic integration of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and anyone for whom English is a second language, living in Glasgow (The Bridges Project 2022). Others received support for themselves and their children from Bridging the Gap (2022). This is a charity established in 1998 and based in the Gorbals area of Glasgow who work with young people, families and people from different backgrounds and cultures. They highlight community inclusion and building relationships across diversity as the core of their work. It was reported that people received help with immigration issues from the British Red Cross in Glasgow. In addition, they offer emergency help, one-to-one support and casework, special services for children and families, and family reunions (British Red Cross 2022).

Finally, Glasgow Afghan United was mentioned by a majority of participants. We will explore this in greater depth later, but social support, educational opportunities, sport and recreation and employment are just some of the ways in which GAU enriched the lives of this group of Afghan people.

“

*I want to make
a difference;
at community,
family and
personal levels”*

Liaqat Ali
Hassanzadah



BUILDING COMMUNITY

Maslow's hierarchy indicates that when basic needs are met, love and community are the next levels of need that must be met, and so we now go on to explore people's experience of community and community building. The UNHCR has emphasized the importance of community building between refugees and host populations. It is believed that positive interactions, particularly at the neighbourhood level, will dispel prejudice and increase the potential for local integration (UNHCR 1996).

TWO IDENTITIES

A unique challenge that is faced by people who have left their own country behind to make a home in a new country is that they are grappling with multiple identities. Montazemi (2021) says that refugees often find a conflict between the identity they have left behind and the one that lies before them. Many people in this study described themselves as Afghani Scots, indicating their sense of dual identity and highlighting that both dimensions of their identity were important to them. One woman captured something of her sense of two identities, she said *"I want to be active lady, but still wearing hijab...I like wearing it!"*.

Although people were keen to be part of Scottish culture, they also recognised that their Afghan culture is just as important, and that the community and its organisations have an important role to play in keeping this alive and vibrant in their lives. Whilst being part of two cultures was generally seen as a positive thing, some talked about the emotional conflict of living in Scotland and having family in Afghan, *"It can be difficult to settle when other members of close family cannot get visas to come to UK"*.

One man told us, I'm still adjusting to the social and cultural life of Scotland compared to Afghanistan even though I have been here for quite a while.

EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY

People's experience of building and being part of community was often shaped by family connections and geography. Firstly, there was a group who had existing connections with the city through family and friends who had relocated here previously. This made the transition to Glasgow a much easier process. The sharing of their knowledge of social, educational and employment opportunities meant that new people quickly made their own connections. Additionally, having social and emotional support, lessened feelings of isolation, anxiety, and stress. Then there were the group who, although

they were fairly isolated, lived in the city and therefore had access to a wide range of organisations and resources. Again, they were quickly signposted and supported to make the connections needed for a productive life. Finally, there was a small group of people who lived in other parts of the country who experience both loneliness and lack of appropriate services. This could include access to cultural and religious opportunities as well as culturally appropriate food. This again raises the plea from participants that, in these cases, groups of 5 to 10 families should be housed in the same neighbourhood. This would solve that problem of isolation and provide support but would still facilitate integration with the wider community. However, in addition there remains the need for projects which can link up these dispersed communities with community hubs in the big cities.

“

*In Glasgow
I have made
friends – nice
supportive
people”*

Zubair Khan



THINGS THAT BUILD COMMUNITY

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

The bedrock of becoming part of the broad community, is to have friendships across different communities. One woman said, *“I had few social contacts initially in Carntyne but when I got to know some other mums from nursery, I began to feel more part of the community”*. Many mentioned the general friendship made with neighbours – they might only have consisted of short conversations, or small acts of kindness, but are highly significant to people feeling part of a community.

Various community spaces also provide opportunities to develop a sense of community through making new friends. Libraries were identified as places that were easy and free to access which offered a range of activities for women and their children. One woman explained that she felt lonely until she went to Ibrox library where she joined a women’s group, made some friends, and learned to speak English more fluently. Some mentioned various community garden projects and allotments as being another place of connection where they made friends, learned new skills, and had access to fresh vegetables.

VOLUNTEERING

Another way in which people build community, is through volunteering. Volunteering has been associated with better physical, mental, and cognitive health (Da Jiang et al 2021) in this study, people told us that volunteering gave them a sense of purpose, let them be part of a team and, importantly, provided them with opportunities to give something to the community.

Volunteering was seen as a way of getting involved in local issues and responding to local needs. An example of which was one woman who is working at the foodbank in Maryhill. She states that she started off with just a visit and ended up regularly working there several hours a week. This gives her both a sense of purpose and belonging.

Volunteering was also seen as a way of using existing skills and experience for the good of others. For example, speakers of Urdu, Hindi and Farsi translated for people whose English was not strong. Similarly, people with qualifications and experience in teaching, beauty and hairdressing worked with local organisations to provide much needed services to the community. Supporting some of these and other volunteering opportunities were a range of organisation including Volunteer Scotland, Citizens Advice, Princess Trust, and the British Red Cross.

Finally, volunteering was seen as a way of strengthening Afghan culture and identity in Scotland. Primarily through Glasgow Afghan United, people volunteered as teachers, youth workers, sports coaches and supported women's groups, culture and language groups and wellbeing and health activities.

STUDYING AND WORKING

Along with learning English, the most mentioned skill that people refer to was learning to drive. The ability to drive reduced isolation, gave a sense of freedom, and opened up social, educational and learning opportunities.

Many of the men work as Uber drivers. They appreciated the flexibility which it offered, enabling them to be more involved in family life and to participate in community activities. Although not everyone saw it as their ideal job, several of them said it as a way of supporting their family and ensuring that their children will be able to attend school, with an aspiration for them to go on to college or university and get a good career.

Some people were successfully working towards picking up the career they had in Afghanistan. These included teaching, medicine, and dentistry. One noticeable exception to this was a man who had been a security expert, working with the British Army. Not only were

there no outlets for his skills in Scotland but he felt abandoned by the UK government, for whom he had sacrificed a great deal to support their efforts in his country. Other people had set up their own businesses, or were working in catering, beauty, and other occupational areas, often combining work and college.

All of this work, whether paid or unpaid, along with the educational and social activities strengthen both the Afghan community in Scotland and their connections across other communities. These processes help to normalise our multi-cultural sense of who we are as a nation. Individuals and families making their lives together, over time, weaves a new sense of who we are collectively and of course, these processes are supported by many interventions by state and civil society organisations.



A STRONG COMMUNITY ORGANISATION

It would be fair to say that Glasgow Afghan United is an anchor organisation which has supported the remarkable progress and achievements that have happened within the Afghan Community over the past 20 years. Although they primarily offer services to the Afghan community, running women's empowerment groups, teaching and learning support to young people and extensive sporting and cultural events, their reach and impact is greater than that.

Over the years the organisation has developed both a deep understanding of the political and social reality of living in Scotland and has established a strong network of contacts and partnerships across education, housing, employment, and immigration issues. This has resulted in them becoming something of a one stop shop for support, advice, and advocacy in many of the issues that newcomers to the city are concerned about.

The profile that the organisation has within politics and civil society, strengthens the community's sense of efficacy and belonging. A further impact of this is acting as a role model to the upcoming generation. One young woman told us that she wants to be famous for her community activities, has already spoken at Scottish Parliament and ultimately wants to be a politician.

GAU also provide a broad range of volunteering opportunities, vital to helping people feel useful, develop skills, and build their CV whilst providing invaluable service to the community.

Recently the organisation has developed aid work back in Afghanistan. Based on their network of contacts, they have been able to target resources to people in real need, bypassing officially sanctioned programmes run by the oppressive regime. This provides a vital, practical way for Afghanis living in Glasgow to respond positively to the plight of friends and family back home.

Their aspiration is not just for a strong Afghan community in Scotland but to play their part in developing a well- integrated and functioning Scotland. Their work in bringing communities together is well exemplified in the annual Burns/Rummi night which brings people together to explore and celebrate each other's culture.

“

*I have the best
of both worlds;
I am an
Afghan Scot”*

Hassanullah
Rasoli



BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

The top level of Maslow's hierarchy is self-actualization; the ability to become the best version of oneself. Maslow stated, *"This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more of what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming"*. Clearly this will vary widely from person to person. We would add that self-actualisation is closely related to ideas of family and community and that many people understand it in generational terms, in other words, the efforts and choices they are making will result in the self-actualisation in their children and grandchildren and not just themselves. The broad areas which we consider here as building for the future and resulting in self-actualisation are, education, work, and making a difference socially and politically.

EDUCATION

Education is seen as an important element in developing a positive future. Most of the people we spoke to were involved in some sort of education, had been recently, or were planning to in the near future. As mentioned above, learning English and learning to drive were seen as gateway skills, that enable access to further opportunities, and so those who did not have those skills named them as their top priority.

People were enthusiastically accessing a wide variety of educational opportunities ranging from informal interactions, web-based provision (including YouTube etc), community-based classes, college course, and university. They were working across the full spectrum of educational levels covering the acquisition

of basic skills, employment related training, degree level qualifications through to PhD level.

As indicated above, some of the parents we spoke to understood their educational engagement to be supporting their children to achieve their full educational and employment potential, at the same time as learning and working. As one father said, “my life is study, childcare, and help children.”

Generally, the parents in this study were optimistic about the future. In particular, they envisage a future for their children where they will exceed their own educational and employment attainments. This is supported by the literature which generally shows inter-generational upward mobility between the children’s educational status and that of their parents (Chimienti et al 2019) Similarly, compared to their parents, the second generation seems to perform far better in the labour market and to earn higher wages (Crul et al., 2012). Generally, people were very satisfied with the education

that their children were receiving, stating that accessing schools had been a simple process and that it would enable them to get good qualifications and jobs. One woman spoke of her experience of school with her daughter, who has special needs. She said that the support she got from teachers and social work were helping her daughter to thrive.

Some people reported that being able to use and build on their qualifications gained in Afghanistan could be difficult. This resulted in some people having to repeat qualifications or having to take up jobs for which they were over-qualified. The UNHRC (2018) insist that, to ensure migrants’ and refugees’ inclusion,

their qualifications and prior learning must be recognized so that they can continue their education and find employment that corresponds to their skills.

WORK

“Despite significant hardships, refugees are pushing the limits of what most people recognize as the general entrepreneurial spirit. There is a resilience among refugee communities that enables them to thrive, not just to survive, and to be creative members of society. And why shouldn’t they?” (UNHRC 2016) This

entrepreneurial spirit was observed in the people we spoke to who had set up their own businesses or were working towards that. For example, one man, who arrived in the UK with nothing, now owns his own car wash business which provides employment for several other community members. Another man, who had some experience of working with cars in Afghanistan, is now studying mechanical engineering and plans to set up his own business when he finishes. Another man who arrived in Glasgow as an unaccompanied minor, studied hard and gained both an undergraduate degree and a masters in Community Development from the University of Glasgow. He is now running a large community organisation which employs many people, brings large amounts of money, and provides multiple resources to the community.

A few people discussed their difficulty in rebuilding their professional identities as doctors, dentists, and teachers. Whilst some steps are being taken to help ease this problem with NHS Employers (2023) working with the Department of Health and Social Care and charities to support the recruitment of skilled

healthcare refugees, the journey is a difficult one. Having said that, a number of people have been able through determination and hard work, to pick up their careers in their chosen profession, or a working towards that goal. This included

midwives, beauty therapists, nursery workers and teachers. Some accessed voluntary organisations either for employment directly or to develop their CV in order to get paid work elsewhere.

Many people are well established in employment which is providing for their families, though it might not be their ultimate career. As mentioned above work is sometimes seen as instrumental in providing learning and professional opportunities for future generations. Several Taxi drivers in the study choose these jobs because of the ease of access and flexibility it offers. This allows them to be more involved in family and community life.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Many people talk about their ambition to make a difference at community, family, and personal levels. This is demonstrated in the high levels of volunteering that was reported. Though this mainly happened within the Afghan community, several people give their time in other community contexts such as in gardening projects, food banks, and learning projects.

The desire to have an impact on wider society is expressed through the work of Glasgow Afghan United

which is in some sense a collective expression of the Afghan community in Glasgow. Their work in establishing partnerships

with other social justice organisations, arts and cultural organisations and sports groups is intentionally enriching the multi-cultural fabric of the city and beyond. On the basis of this work, GAU has been able to establish a credibility and influence within political and civil society which in turn has a positive impact on how the community is perceived.

As discussed above, people here have a strong desire to see improvements in the lives of people still living in Afghanistan. Through advocacy, influence, and the community-based aid programmes that GAU has established, community members can have a small, but tangible impact on the lives of their people back home.

BLOCKAGES AND BARRIERS

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, people's ability to self-actualise is not just a personal issue, it is tied up with ideas and experience of family. One man told us that he cannot fully fulfil his potential or feel fully part of the UK because he can't bring family from Afghanistan to UK for a visit – even though he is British citizen – *“how can I be British if his family can't visit? It would be a different case if they were living in Canada or somewhere in Europe!”*.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We would like to express our gratitude to Abdul Botstani and his team at Glasgow Afghan United for enabling this project to happen. Through their networks we were able to have 40 conversations with people who had come from numerous difficult circumstances in Afghanistan and were now at various points in the journey towards making a life for themselves and their families in Scotland. The stories they shared and the insights we gained, gives a snapshot of people who are brave, resourceful, and determined to make a success of their new home.

We are not suggesting that this work is definitive of the experience of all seeking a home in Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland, but it is illustrative of the experience of a particular group of people who, through their own efforts and resourcefulness, with some support from the state and civil society, have been able to educate themselves, support their families, build relationships and make a contribution to the rich and diverse life that is Scotland in the 21st century. Through our conversations, there were many recurring themes which illustrate factors which enable people to settle more easily in their new country.

BECOMING ESTABLISHED IN A COMMUNITY was made easier by having stable, long-term housing, rather than being put in temporary accommodation; happily, this was the experience of most people in this study. In parallel to this, the provision of housing officers and case workers who were specifically allocated to them, provided a known point of contact and could

both help them with housing issues and signpost them to other services and agencies.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS was highlighted by many people. The individuals we spoke to had some sort of connection with GAF and were therefore able to access some support and resources. We would argue is that type of support, that is tailored to groups' particular needs, should be made available to all seeking a new life in this country.

EDUCATION was highlighted as an essential factor in effectively establishing oneself and as a strength in the Scottish context. Community-based provision, schools, FE Colleges and Universities, were all commended for their accessibility and the quality of their provision. The benefits that flow from this, in addition to the acquisition of skills and qualifications include: improved social contact, better mental health, connections beyond their own social or cultural group

There was much discussion about **POLICIES OF THE DISPERSAL OF REFUGEES**. Whilst a minority acknowledged that in the past large groups of refugees in one location proved to be a barrier to integration, people overwhelmingly stressed the importance of having access to people in the same situation as a source of invaluable support. The preference was for families to be housed in bigger cities where there is access to specialized services, appropriate food shops and places of worship. It was recognised that on some occasions people might have to be placed in smaller towns. Where this is the case, the plea is that these should be groups of 5 to 10 families which would solve that problem of isolation and provide support but still facilitate

integration with the wider community. Additionally, projects are required to link up dispersed communities with community hubs in the big cities.



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