

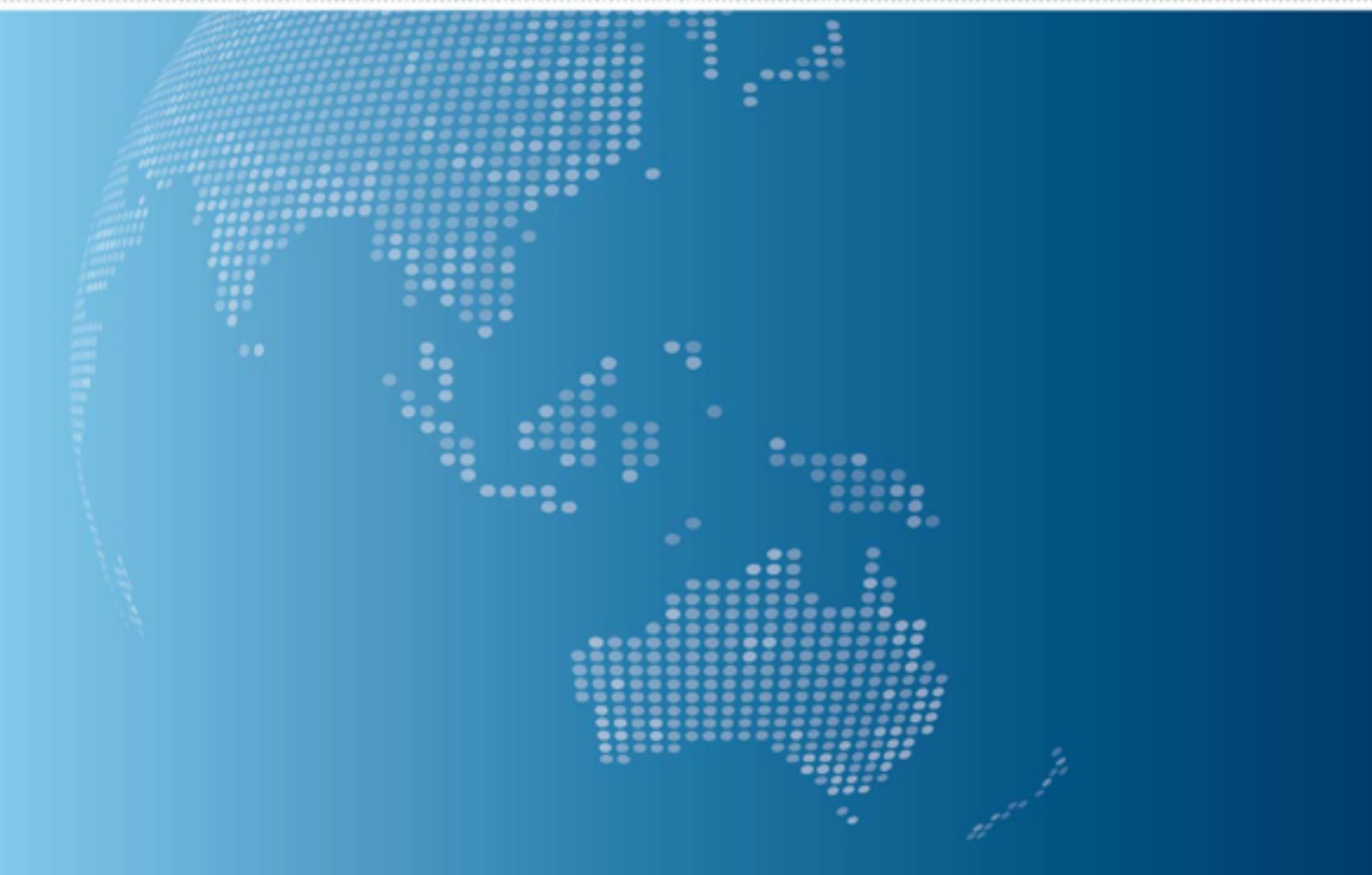
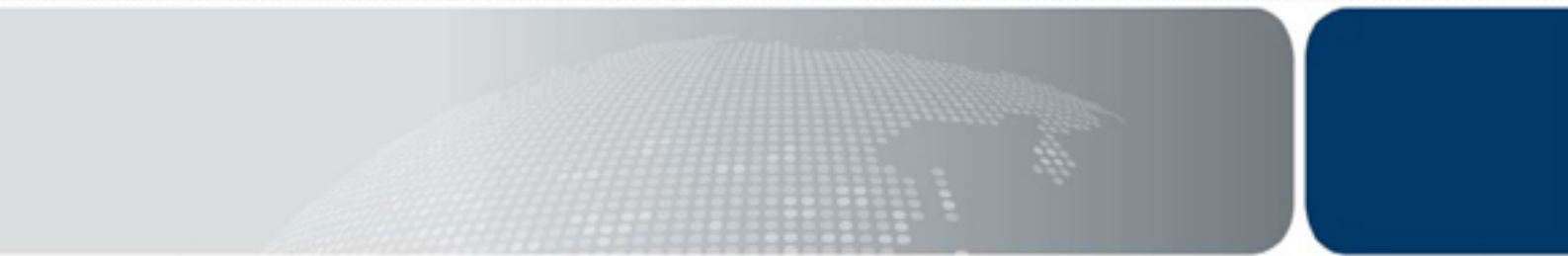


Australian Government
Department of Immigration
and Citizenship

Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Submission to the Inquiry into Australia's overseas development programs in Afghanistan

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade



Introduction

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) welcomes this opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Reference Standing Committee's inquiry: Australia's overseas development programs in Afghanistan.

DIAC's submission details the department's current overseas development assistance (ODA) funded programs and activities in Afghanistan and provides some additional information in relation to key areas of priority for DIAC engagement with Afghanistan and Afghan nationals that may be of interest to the Inquiry.

The submission makes some brief contextual comment on the environment in Afghanistan, as it relates to DIAC's specific programs. The submission does not provide extensive detail on the whole-of-government development priorities and general political/security situation in Afghanistan, and leaves this to submissions to be provided by AusAID, the Department of Defence and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

On 13 August 2012, the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers released its Report containing 22 recommendations to the Government on the policy options available to prevent asylum seekers risking their lives on dangerous boat journeys to Australia. Recommendations include the development of a more effective whole-of-government strategy for engaging with countries of origin and first asylum to address the root causes of displacement and to maximise protection, with a focus on resettlement, and to further develop the Regional Co-operation Framework through enhanced protection capacity for displaced persons and asylum seekers to Australia. Afghanistan is currently the largest source of Irregular Maritime Arrivals (IMAs) to Australia.

Context of DIAC's overseas development programs in Afghanistan

Today Afghanistan is a country in transition. After years of ongoing conflict, the country is rebuilding, although security and development remains fragile. The Afghan Government and the international community face significant obstacles and challenges to restoring peace.

Together with other International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) nations, the Australian Government and DIAC remain committed to assisting Afghanistan as it transitions to a more independent position from 2014.

According to the UNHCR,¹ 5.7 million refugees - 4.6 million of them with UNHCR assistance - have returned to Afghanistan since 2002, increasing the population of the country by some 25 per cent. UNHCR conducted an assessment in 2011, to gauge the level of reintegration achieved by the returnees. The survey, which covered both urban and rural areas, has shown that more than 40 per cent of returnees have not reintegrated into their home communities. Similar conclusions were reached by a joint UNHCR and World Bank study among urban populations. Specific areas needing improvement include land tenure and housing, livelihood opportunities, and access to public services and water.

The first half of 2011 saw a rapid increase in conflict-induced internal displacement in Afghanistan, creating nearly 100,000 new internally displaced persons (IDPs) and bringing the total IDP population to approximately 500,000.² Securing access to the displaced, responding to their immediate needs and pursuing advocacy aimed at reducing displacement and promoting returns are key tasks for UNHCR. The same applies to the humanitarian assistance being provided by UNHCR to those affected and displaced by natural disasters.

Afghan nationals currently represent the largest proportion of IMAs coming to Australia.³ Between July 2009 and June 2011, over 4,200 Afghan IMAs arrived in Australia.⁴ While official figures for 2011-12 are not yet available, it is estimated that over 3,300 Afghan IMAs arrived between July 2011 and June

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/>

² Ibid

³ Asylum Statistics – Australia: Quarterly Tables March Quarter 2012, DIAC

⁴ Ibid

2012. With an already established community, Australia remains the preferred destination of Hazaras fleeing Afghanistan (the Hazara community in Australia is the largest in the Western world).

Afghanistan requires significant assistance and support in stabilising displaced persons and returnees through accommodation and livelihoods programs, which would be further supported by enhanced Afghan Government capacity. DIAC ODA-funded projects in Afghanistan, implemented under the Displaced Persons Program (DPP) and the Afghanistan-Australia Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Migration and Humanitarian Co-operation, focus on these priorities.

The likelihood of continuing insecurity, political instability, economic and social problems in Afghanistan during transition of security responsibility to the Afghan Government by the end of 2014, make it likely that many Afghans will continue to seek asylum or better opportunities elsewhere.

In consultation with AusAID and DFAT, DIAC has communicated the Australian Government's in-principle endorsement of the *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees* developed by UNHCR and the Governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. The *Strategy* outlines a multilateral framework for coordinating donor assistance to Afghan refugees and displaced persons in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, by focussing on building sustainable livelihoods, encouraging voluntary repatriation and preserving asylum space funded through current contributions.

Overview of DIAC's Bilateral Program in Afghanistan

DIAC manages a number of ODA-funded programs in Afghanistan on behalf of the Australian Government.

DIAC's DPP funds a number of projects in Afghanistan, and countries where there are significant numbers of displaced Afghans such as Pakistan and Iran, aimed at stabilising displaced Afghan populations and providing support to those returning to Afghanistan.

As Afghanistan continues to improve its governance, DIAC is working to assist the development of Afghanistan's migration management and border security capacities in conjunction and coordinated with the international community. DIAC's capacity building programs in Afghanistan are largely centred on technical training and equipment provision. DIAC has also funded the development of the AliceGhan settlement as a new residential community for returning and displaced Afghans.

DIAC technical training programs include document examination (passports), facial imaging and intelligence analysis. DIAC has funded the gifting of equipment for use at the Kabul airport and continues to support the upgrade of Afghan migration systems through activities such as the Afghan Passports/Visa Issuance System (APIS/AVIS) project. DIAC also funds non-government organisations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), to undertake much of its capacity building work.

Additionally, AusAID's Australia Awards provide long and short term study and professional development opportunities to citizens from developing countries around the globe, including Afghanistan. DIAC requires that all AusAID scholarship recipients enter Australia on a Subclass 576 – AusAID or Defence Sector visa which is designed for international students who are sponsored by AusAID or Defence to study a full-time course of any time in Australia.

Displaced Persons Program (DPP)

The DPP enables DIAC to strengthen Australia's humanitarian profile to implement projects which support durable solutions for refugees and other displaced populations, or, where durable solutions cannot be found, support their protection and stabilisation. The overarching objectives of the DPP are to:

1. Support countries of first asylum and transit countries to host refugee populations where return is not practicable/feasible, including support for resettlement and local integration.
2. Enhance the protection role of the UNHCR and other relevant agencies in source countries, countries of first asylum, and transit countries.

3. Encourage sustainable voluntary returns of persons no longer in need of protection, including assisting negotiations with source countries on returns and with countries of first asylum on readmission.
4. Reduce the prospect and flow of irregular arrivals from source countries.

According to the UNHCR, there are close to 2.7 million Afghan refugees and asylum seekers spread across 79 countries, making this cohort the largest displacement of persons in the world. Ninety-five per cent of these are in Pakistan and Iran.⁵ Displaced Afghans in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, continue to be an ongoing priority for the DPP. Since 2006, over AUD6.5 million has been provided for DPP initiatives to assist over 10,000 displaced Afghans in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.

The DPP funded several projects in 2011-12 (some for implementation in 2012-13) aimed at assisting displaced Afghans.

For the 2011-2012 program, DIAC is providing assistance to vulnerable Afghans forced to return to Afghanistan from Iran. DIAC has provided funding for the provision of 18,000 family Non-Food Item (NFI) kits, containing basic house-hold items, to vulnerable undocumented Afghan returnees from Iran in order to support the start-up of their new life at their final destination. The 2011-12 program is also currently funding a project at the Afghan/Pakistan border to enable better emergency responses to Afghan refugees returning from Pakistan, and includes an upgrade of border reception facilities, provision of transportation and other services to 3,600 families, and provision of family NFI kits for 1,500 families.

In early 2012, DIAC contracted IOM to provide emergency transport and temporary accommodation assistance for vulnerable undocumented Afghan returnees from Iran and to increase the capacity and facilities of two border reception centres in Afghanistan. The updated centres will provide screening and registration facilities for Afghan returnees from Iran, as well as serving as a base for the provision of services including transportation cash grants, family NFI kits, basic medical care and overnight accommodation with meals until departure to their final destination. To date, over 450 families have received NFI kits and over 4,700 NFI kits have been procured for distribution.

For a listing of recent DPP projects in Afghanistan, please see **Table 1**.

DIAC Capacity Building – Migration Management and Border Security

Afghanistan-Australia Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Migration and Humanitarian Co-operation

On 17 January 2011, an MOU was signed between Australia, Afghanistan and the UNHCR. The MOU covers the provision of assistance to Afghanistan to build capacity in their government ministries, and the sustainable, and preferably voluntary, return to Afghanistan of Afghans found not to be in need of international protection. DIAC is delivering a number of capacity building projects under the auspices of the MoU. These include the APIS/AVIS project, further initiatives at the AliceGhan settlement and the placement of an immigration expert in the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR).

Afghan Passport Issuance System/Afghan Visa Issuance System (APIS/AVIS)

DIAC is working through IOM with the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Afghan Ministry of Interior (Moi) to improve the efficiency and technical processes of the Afghan passport issuing system to facilitate the movement in and out of Afghanistan. At the conclusion of this project Afghan passports will meet International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) recommended standards which ensure higher integrity standards for Afghan passports.

DIAC has committed AUD 5.9 million, over the 2011-12 and 2012-13 Financial Years to fund Phase III of the project. Activities completed under Phase III so far include: the provision and fit-out of dedicated passport offices within the Moi; the procurement of technical and IT equipment (including passport printers); and the roll-out of the system to 90 per cent of Afghan diplomatic missions. The first ICAO-compliant passports are expected to be printed in early 2013.

⁵ UNHCR Global Trends 2011, <http://www.unhcr.org/4fd6f87f9.html>

Embedded Officer in the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR)

Under the MOU, DIAC has committed to fund the secondment of a senior IOM officer to MoRR to assist with policy development and administrative support. The officer's duties will include the provision of ministerial advice on policy, legal and operational matters related to the core areas of MoRR's work. The placement will be for an initial 6 months. DIAC, IOM and MoRR are currently finalising arrangements for its implementation.

AliceGhan

In 2005, the department provided USD 7,200,000 (including USD 1,750,000 from AusAID) to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the AliceGhan Housing Project. This project sought to aid the reintegration of landless returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) through the development of a housing settlement. The construction of houses for AliceGhan was completed in December 2009, after which they were handed over to the Afghan Government.

Under the MOU, DIAC has agreed to fund further initiatives at AliceGhan to enable the settlement to reach its full potential, including the building of boundary walls for each dwelling, and employment generation and vocational training projects. However, despite the official completion of the project, outstanding activities, including the establishment of sustainable water infrastructure, have hindered the implementation of further initiatives at AliceGhan.

The development of sustainable water infrastructure has been delayed by a land dispute between the Afghan Government and the local community that owns the water resources. The Afghan Government is engaging with the local Afghan authorities to resolve the land dispute. An interim water arrangement is in place (which has involved trucking water in on a daily basis and the use of wells) while the issue is resolved. Of the 1,030 houses completed, about 200 are currently occupied - an occupancy rate of about 20 per cent. A needs assessment undertaken by CARE Australia in 2011 attributed the low occupancy rate to the lack of a permanent water supply. It is anticipated that once a sustainable water supply is established there will be an increase in people settling in Afghanistan.

The department is keen to see the construction of sustainable water infrastructure at AliceGhan and is working with the Afghan Government to this end.

Capacity Building Training

DIAC also provides technical capacity building training relating to migration and border management to Afghan officials such as document examination, facial image comparison, intelligence analysis and investigations capabilities. Due to the security restraints in Afghanistan, much of the training is conducted in third countries. Since 2009, over 40 Afghan officials have received training which will assist in more effective migration and border management for Afghanistan.

Identity Checking Unit (IDCU)

Since 2003, DIAC has provided approximately AUD 450 000 in equipment and training to establish an Identity Checking Unit (IDCU) to enhance the capacity of Afghan authorities to undertake identity and nationality checking required for the issuance of Afghan travel documents to persons claiming to be Afghan nationals residing in third countries, including Australia. Since its inception, the IDCU has assessed around 3 000 identity claims and verified some 1,000 Afghan identity documents for Australian, Belgian and Danish authorities.

For a listing of recent capacity building training in Afghanistan, please see **Table 2**.

Migration Program for Afghans

Decades of civil strife and militancy have had a devastating impact on educational, social and governance institutions in Afghanistan: the estimated literacy rate is 28%⁶; and Afghanistan is rated 172 (out of 187) on the UNDP's Human Development Index.⁷ It is assumed that poor access to education and limited skills capacities mean that Afghans generally will not meet requirements for

⁶ CIA Factbook, "Afghanistan", <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2103.html>,

⁷ UNDP Human Development Index Ratings 2011, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

regular migration pathways to Australia (especially through Skilled Migration). In 2011-12, some 789 Afghan nationals migrated permanently to Australia, of which 763 (96.7 per cent) were through family migration. Regular Australian migration programs for Afghan applicants are managed by the Australian High Commission in Islamabad.

AusAID's Australia Awards provide study and professional development opportunities to citizens from developing countries, including Afghanistan. Recipients enter Australia on a Subclass 576 – AusAID or Defence Sector visa which is designed for international students who are sponsored by AusAID or Defence to study a full-time course in Australia. In 2011-12 DIAC granted 15,860 subclass 576 visas globally, including 111 to Afghan nationals. The AusAID submission to the Committee will provide further details of the Awards program.

Safety of DIAC officers and contracted workers in Afghanistan

In September 2010, the department placed a Principal Migration Officer (PMO) position in Kabul with aims to establish a sustainable framework for the return and reintegration of Afghans who do not meet the requirements for Australia's protection under Australian and international law. DIAC ensures PMO duties and responsibilities strictly adhere to Commonwealth responsibilities under applicable Work Health and Safety legislation. DFAT is currently developing a whole-of-government policy applying to the safety of Australian-based officers posted to Afghanistan. All security arrangements for officers in Kabul are managed by DFAT.

International/Non-government Contractors

Organisations contracted by DIAC to deliver capacity building projects are selected for their demonstrated ability to manage and deliver projects in challenging environments such as those in Afghanistan. Under the Funding Agreements signed between DIAC and service delivery organisations, the organisation is required to employ qualified personnel and report any security incidents to DIAC in a prompt manner.

Funding Agreements also require service delivery organisations to ensure appropriate public liability and professional indemnity insurances are in place for each project, and require that their practices strictly comply with Australian Work Health and Safety legislation requirements.

1. Table of DPP projects in Afghanistan since 2010

| Year | Delivery Partner | Project | Cost |
|---------|------------------|--|-------------|
| 2010-11 | IOM | Provision of non-food items to regions affected by natural disasters. Kits include seasonal clothing, blankets, hygiene items, cooking and serving items and basic construction tools. | USD 548 000 |
| 2011-12 | CARE | Focuses on psychosocial support, training opportunities, access to markets, skills building, and livestock distribution for women assessed as most vulnerable – Ghazni Province. | AUD 600 000 |
| 2011-12 | IOM | Provision of non-food item kits at the borders for Afghan nationals returning from Iran, Kits include cooking, sewing, serving and hygiene items. | USD 500 000 |
| 2011-12 | IOM | Border facilities upgrades to assist in the transitory accommodation and processing of Afghan nationals returning from Iran and Pakistan. | USD 150 000 |

*Currency usage varies depending on the preference of the organisation.

2. Table of recent capacity building activities in Afghanistan

| Year | Capacity Building | Location | Cost |
|---------|--|------------------------|---|
| 2009-10 | Document Examination Training for six Afghan Border Officers. | Istanbul, Turkey | AUD 10 000 |
| 2011 | Facial Image Comparison Principles and Application Training for 16 Afghan officials from the Ministry of the Interior. | Dubai | AUD 32 000 (inclusive of other training in the region) |
| 2010 | Document Examination, Facial Recognition and Immigration Intelligence Workshop for 19 Afghan Immigration and Border security officials. | Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia | AUD 40 000 |
| 2005-09 | The establishment of the AliceGhan Settlement for the reintegration of returnees and internally displaced. | AliceGhan | AUD 7 200 000 |
| 2005-12 | Afghan Passports/Visas Issuance System (APIS/AVIS) Project Phases I, II and III, to lift Afghan passports to international integrity standards. | Kabul | Phase I-II USD 1 300 000 Phase III AUD 5 900 000 |
| 2012-13 | Embedded Officer in the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR). | Kabul | USD 100 000 |
| 2003-11 | Identity Checking Unit (IDCU) to enhance the capacity of Afghan authorities to undertake identity and nationality checking required for the issuance of travel documents | Kabul | AUD 450 000 |

*Figures have been rounded up to the nearest 10 000