



THE SENATE  
**SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE REFERENCES  
COMMITTEE**

**Inquiry into Australia's engagement in Afghanistan  
Questions on notice**

Refugee Council of Australia

Dr Louise Olliff, Senior Policy Advisor

Mr Muzafar Ali, Community Representative, Co-Founder, Cisarua Refugee Learning  
Centre

**Question 1**

**Senator RICE:** Thanks, Dr Olliff and Mr Ali, for your evidence today and for the Refugee Council's submission, a very useful compendium of information for the committee. I wanted to go to a few things in your submission, and it is very comprehensive so I can't cover them all. In particular, you have just been talking with the chair about documentation and verifying identity. You say that we need to be able to do it differently, given the difficulties of not having the documentation. Do you have any suggestions as to what that process would look like?

**Dr Olliff:** I think that's something we would have to take on notice. I haven't got the answer straight off, other than to support my colleagues at the Law Council in pointing to the fact that other countries are finding ways of identifying people and that there needs to be some flexibility in approach. Rather than saying, 'This is the one way of identifying people,' what other ways can we do that, recognising the challenging situations? Deferring to UNHCR, for example, around the processes that they use or other UN bodies that are helping with the identification of people would be one way to go, looking at scoping out what sort of alternative ways are available to identify someone's identity and their previous work, for example. Muzafar, do you have anything there?

**Mr Ali:** I would just add one more point to include diaspora communities to help the department or the authorities to identify the individuals. The country of Afghanistan is diverse and sometimes it is so interconnected or complex that it is very hard, even for UNHCR, who has been dealing with these cases and issues for a long time. They make mistakes in their judgement.

**Senator RICE:** Presumably we could learn from the US, with their commitment to take 125,000 refugees from Afghanistan on top of the 73½ thousand that they evacuated from Kabul after the fall of Kabul—you would think that there was something we could learn from them, because we will be facing the same problems as they will be.

**Answer**

In response to this question on notice, we would like to draw the Committee's attention to a recent paper by Afghanistan expert, Ali Reza Yunespour, titled "Documentation Problems for Asylum Seekers and Refugees from Afghanistan". This paper outlines some of the reasons why accurate documentation can be problematic to secure for those displaced from Afghanistan, and outlines prospects and uncertainties for accessing and verifying documentation in the current context. This includes questions about the validity of

passports and other identity documents issued at this time and when no foreign government has officially recognised the interim Taliban government.

Dr Yunespour's expert advice reinforces the evidence given by Mr Ali during the public hearing that the Australian Government should enhance engagement with existing Afghan communities and associations in Australia to help establish the identity of visa and citizenship applicants in the absence of verifiable and credible government-issued documentation.

Dr Yunespour's paper and contact details can be accessed from the Refugee Council of Australia website here: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/documentation-problems-for-afghanistan/>.

Related to this, the Committee Chair asked for clarification on the initiative that was mentioned in our testimony supporting diaspora humanitarian responses in Europe. We wish to clarify that there are a number of relevant initiatives that hold potential examples of constructive diaspora engagement for the Australian Government to consider. These include:

- The Danish Refugee Council's Diaspora Programme which was established in 2010 to engage directly with different diaspora actors to facilitate and strengthen their constructive engagement in countries of origin, transit and residence. (See: <https://drc.ngo/our-work/what-we-do/civil-society-engagement-cse/diaspora/>)
- The Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination (DAMEC) initiative, which is currently funded by USAID (an earlier iteration of this project was funded by the European Union) and is hosted by the Danish Refugee Council. DEMAC is a global initiative aimed at enhancing mutual knowledge and coordination, communication and coherence between diaspora humanitarian actors and the institutional humanitarian system. (See: <https://www.demac.org/>).
- The Afghan Diaspora Engagement in Europe Project, which aims at supporting increased dialogue and agency within the Afghan diaspora in Europe as well as between the Afghan diaspora and the Afghan Government. (See: <https://drc.ngo/our-work/what-we-do/civil-society-engagement-cse/diaspora/adee-en/>).

No equivalent support or recognition of the Afghan diaspora in Australia exists to support or enhance their humanitarian interventions.