



**ETHNIC COUNCIL
OF SHEPPARTON AND DISTRICT Inc.**

Reg. No. A6321

Afghani Community Profile



May 2010

Updated June 2013

Updated June 2015



Country Background

Location

At 652,230 square kilometers (251,830 sq mi), Afghanistan is the world's 41st largest country, slightly bigger than France and smaller than Burma, about the size of Texas in the United States. It borders Pakistan in the south and east, Iran in the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the north, and China in the Far East.

The old silk route crossed this land once known as Ariana.

Afghanistan is an impoverished and least developed country, one of the worlds poorest due to the decades of war and nearly complete lack of foreign investment. The nation's GDP stands at about \$45.3 billion with an exchange rate of \$20.65 billion, and the GDP per capita is about \$1,100. The country's export was \$2.6 billion in 2010. Its unemployment rate is about 35% and roughly the same percentage of its citizens live below the poverty line. About 42% of the population live on less than \$1 a day, according to a 2009 report. The nation has less than \$1.5 billion external debt and is recovering by the assistance of the world community.



Population

Afghanistan's population in 2012 was estimated at 31,108,077 which includes the roughly 2.7 million Afghan refugees still living in Pakistan and Iran.

In 1979, the population was reported to be about 15.5 million. The only city with over a million residents is its capital, Kabul. The other largest cities in the country are, in order of population size, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad, Lashkar Gah, Taloqan, Khost, Sheberghan, Ghazni, and so on. Urban areas are experiencing rapid population growth following the return of over 5 million expats. According to the Population Reference Bureau, the Afghan population is estimated to increase to 82 million by 2050

A brief history¹

Afghanistan's recent history is characterized by war and civil unrest. The Soviet Union invaded in 1979 but was forced to withdraw 10 years later by anti Communist mujahidin forces supplied and trained by the US, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and others. Fighting subsequently continued among the various mujahidin factions, giving rise to a state of warlordism that eventually spawned the Taliban.

Backed by foreign sponsors, the Taliban developed as a political force and eventually seized power. The Taliban were able to capture most of the country, aside from Northern Alliance strongholds primarily in the northeast, until US and allied military action in support of the opposition following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks forced the group's downfall. In late 2001, major leaders from the Afghan opposition groups and Diaspora met in Bonn, Germany and agreed on a plan for the formulation of a new government structure that resulted in the inauguration of Hamid Karzai as Chairman of the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) on 22 December 2001. The AIA held a nationwide Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) in June 2002, and Karzai was elected President by secret ballot of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (TISA).

The Transitional Authority had an 18 months mandate to hold a nationwide Loya Jirga to adopt a constitution and a 24 months mandate to hold nationwide elections; in early January 2004 Afghanistan adopted its new constitution, establishing the country as an Islamic republic.

After being postponed twice, Afghanistan's Presidential election, in which over 8 million people voted, was finally held on 9th October 2004. Hamid Karzai, the interim president was the winner with 55.4% of the votes. Although the adoption of a new constitution in January 2004 and the election of Hamid Karzai as President in October 2004 were considered major advance in Afghanistan's fragmented political life, substantial regional power centres remained in 2006.

After the first National Assembly was seated in December 2005, the balance between the executive and legislative branches remained uncertain, and Karzai was obliged to name key regional warlords to his new cabinet in 2006. In March 2006, the United Nations renewed for one year the mandate of its Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), designed to provide political and strategic guidance. In addition to occasionally violent political jockeying and ongoing military action to root out remaining

terrorists and Taliban elements, the country suffers from enormous poverty, a crumbling infrastructure, and widespread land mines.

The last parliamentary election was held in September 2010, but due to disputes and investigation of fraud, the sworn in ceremony took place in late January 2011. After the issuance of computerized ID cards for the first time, which is a \$101 million project that the Afghan government plans to start in 2012, it is expected to help prevent major fraud in future elections and improve the security situation

Afghanistan is an Islamic republic consisting of three branches, executive, legislative and judicial. The National Assembly is the legislature, a bicameral body having two chambers, the House of the People and the House of Elders.

The Supreme Court is court is seen as moderate and is led by Chief Justice Abdul Salam Azimi, a former university professor who had been a legal advisor to the president.

Three decades of war made Afghanistan one of the world's most dangerous countries, including the largest producer of refugees and asylum seekers. While the international community is rebuilding war-torn Afghanistan, terrorist groups such as the Haqqani Network and Hezbi Islami are actively involved in a nationwide Taliban-led insurgency,¹ which includes hundreds of assassinations and suicide attacks. According to the United Nations, the insurgents were responsible for 80% of civilian casualties in 2011 and 2012.

Following the 2014 presidential election President Hamid Karzai left power and Ashraf Ghani became the President on 29 September 2014.

Ethnicity, language and religion

Ethnicity

Afghanistan has a mix of races and cultures. In 2013, approximately 42% of Afghans were Pashtun, 11.4 of whom are of the Durrani tribal groups and 13.8% of the Ghilzai group. Tajiks make up the second largest ethnic group with 27% of the population, followed by Hazara 8%. Uzbeks, 9%, Aimaq 4%, Turkmen 3% and Baloch 2%.⁵

Ethnic groups in Afghanistan

Pashtun	42%
Tajik	27%
Hazara	8%
Uzbek	9%
Aimaq	4%
Turkmen	3%
Baloch	2%
Others	4%

Language

In Afghanistan there is two official languages Pashtu and Dari. Arabic script is used in both languages. The literacy rate in Afghanistan is 36%.¹

Religion

Islam is one of the few commonalities in Afghan society despite the existence of sectarian differences and variations in Quaranic and legal interpretations. Approximately 99% of Afghans are Muslims. There is two type of muslim Shia and Suni. In Afghan 85% of the population are Sunni and the rest are Shia.¹

Family Values

The family is extremely important in Afghanistan. Family honour is an important influence on the behaviour of people. When necessary, family members give advice on the way they should behave in public and on any desirable changes in their behaviour. Such family pressure is very powerful and effective in controlling the behaviour of family members.

Role of men and women

The father is head of the household and is traditionally responsible for earning money to support the family. The mother's prime responsibility is the care of the children and the management of the household. In rural areas the wife may help in the fields in certain seasons. In cities it is common to have husband and wife working outside the home. Under Islamic law, women have equal rights with men; however, many women in Afghanistan tend to be subordinate to their husbands, fathers and brothers. In rural

areas, their life centres on the home and is restricted socially and in terms of educational opportunity.

Children and childcare

Children are highly valued in Afghan society. Breast-feeding is common for the first year. Childhood immunisation is an accepted health practice. Girls are expected to stay at home and help the mother with home duties. Boys are encouraged to be adventurous and independent; they are allowed more freedom to come and go than girls are. All boys are circumcised before physical maturity is reached. It is an important occasion and parties are held to celebrate.

Elderly members of the community are respected, honoured and often consulted on child rearing practices. Adult family members are responsible for the care of elderly relatives.

Education and Employment

Education

Education is valued and Afghan parents want their children to do well at school. Traditionally, education was given by religious leaders and was mainly concerned with learning the Koran (Qayán), the holy book. The teaching of morality is given a high place in Islamic culture.

While school is compulsory and free in government schools, between 7 and 12 years of age but in rural areas schools may not be available. Nomadic families rarely have their children educated. The overall literacy rate is low: males - 39%, females - 8% *.

Informal education and culture is transmitted by families and religious leaders through folk story, song and dance.

Occupations

In the cities, women are generally educated and they may work outside the home as well as manage their households. Women are paid according to their educational qualifications and seniority so men and women receive equal pay for equal work. However, career opportunities for women have been restricted, being mostly in the traditional female areas of nursing, teaching and welfare.

Afghani's in Australia²

Afghan-Australian relations can be traced back to the 1860s when Afghan cameleers came to Australia. For half a century, the cameleers played a crucial role in the exploration and development of the Australian outback, ferrying supplies across the continent. The Adelaide to Alice Springs train (now extended to Darwin), the Ghan, is named in their honour.

The next wave of Afghan migration to Australia followed the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan when thousands fled their homeland. The first Afghans to arrive in Australia were camel drivers hired in 1859 to participate in the Burke and Wills expedition. These drivers played a critical role in opening up the vast Australian outback to Europeans. In these times camel trains were a crucial life support system to outback communities. The cameleers came from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Turkish empire and their labour and skills in hot, dry arid conditions made possible a number of key projects including the Overland Telegraph Line between Adelaide and Darwin, the Queensland Border Fence, the Transcontinental railway Line between Port Augusta, South Australia and Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, and the Rabbit Proof fence and Canning Stock Route in Western Australia. Cameleers were also vital to the early wool and mining industries. What's more, some of the exploratory expeditions which traversed the most inhospitable parts of Australia only survived due to the expertise and endurance of the cameleers in the hot and waterless land (they were also dependent upon Indigenous Australian skill and knowledge of country).

There are still remnants of these Afghan histories in many Australian cities – the date palms in Alice Springs, cemeteries in Broken Hill, Marree, Coolgardie and elsewhere, and mosques in Adelaide and Perth. Camel races continue in various parts of the country, while the train line that connects southern Australia to Alice Springs is still referred to as the 'Ghan' in honour of the early contributions to this country of Afghan people. And, of course, camels themselves remain an enduring part of life in northern Australia.

By the end of the nineteenth century, racial intolerance swept across Australia directed primarily at the Chinese, the Pacific Islanders in Queensland, and the Afghans. Acts of violence and harassment at the local level, linked with the national policies of The Immigration Restriction Act, later to be known as the White Australia policy, and refusals

to grant Afghan people naturalisation (even those who had been living in Australia for up to thirty years) gradually debilitated the Afghan community in Australia.

In 1993 there were approximately 5,000 Afghans in Australia. Most of them live in Sydney with about 750 in Melbourne. Most of the Afghans arrived here as a result of the coup and the Soviet invasion. The communist coup occurred in April 1978 with the Soviet invasion commencing in 1979. It brought to an end more than 200 years of almost uninterrupted rule by the family of Zahir Shah and Mohammad Daoud.

Another wave of Afghans began about 1999 when they began to arrive by boat. They were largely of Hazara background. Most of the Hazaras were young men, often leaving wives and young children behind.

The 2011 census reports that 28,597 Afghan born people were residing in Australia.³

The Afghani Community in Shepparton

Population

It is estimated that 135 families and 450 single Afghans (mostly male) live in Shepparton with a total population of approximately 1600 people. The Shepparton Afghan community started to develop from 2005 when many of the men came to pick fruit. Many then decided to stay and sponsor their families. Community leaders estimate that approximately 50% of the Shepparton population have arrived by boat and have experience of the detention centre process.

Language

It is estimated that 80% of the Afghani people in Shepparton speak Hazaragi. 98% of the adults whose first language is Hazaragi are illiterate in this language. Approximately 70% can speak some English but are more than likely not able to read or write English.

Education

Some Afghans have resided in rural areas in Afghanistan prior to coming to Australia and thus may have had limited access to schooling. Males may have completed primary school and a few have higher education. Due to the war a number have missed

education and therefore may be illiterate in their own language. A few are higher educated.

All children have been enrolled into local schools and are attending the McGuire College, Shepparton High and Wanganui Secondary College.

Employment

Most Afghan men are employed predominantly in farming occupations. Due to limitations in English skills and education, employment opportunities are limited for the Afghani community however there is a strong work ethic and many will work additional shifts or hours to generate a family income.

Contacts

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Issues⁴

Language

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The fact that so many Afghanis' are illiterate in their first language creates many barriers. The Afghani people often have trouble accessing mainstream services and participating in activities outside of the home.

The lack of language skills also puts enormous pressure on those that are illiterate and particular on those who can read and write English. Those that can read and write in

English are called upon frequently as interpreters and to assist others navigate government systems thus placing a lot of pressure on a small pool of people. The community has identified a need for increased English language training linked to day to day activities and vocational training.

Community Leadership

Great pressure is placed on the community leaders due to the generally poor English skills and low levels of education amongst the older section of the community. In early 2015 through community elections the community resolved to undertake a complete change of its leaders to a younger team; not through any sense of dissatisfaction but rather a recognition that the young educated English speakers would be better equipped.

Citizenship

Most Afghani's want to gain their Australian citizenship which would enable them to visit their family back in Afghanistan. When returning to Afghanistan some people have been forced to pay bribe money as the authorities will not recognise the legitimacy of the travel documents issued by the Australia government. Possessing an Australian passport would eliminate this issue.

The barrier to gaining citizenship is twofold. The citizenship test can only be undertaken in English. No interpreters are allowed. This means that the applicants have to read the questions on the test in English. This is particularly difficult for a majority of the Afghani people who cannot even read and write in their own language.

Funding and Associations

The Afghani association applies annually for funding for assistance with festival events and for sporting clubs. Members of the Association are financing their sporting clubs including equipment, from their own pockets. The Association would also like assistance to source other funding opportunities for their sporting clubs.

Women

The Afghani women tend to be quite isolated, tend not to socialise outside of the home and are reliant on men for language and transport. The women seek opportunities to

socialise outside of the home and also opportunities to engage in physical activity. Community also lack women leaders. Important issues for the women include driving licences, playgroups, language and leadership.

Education

Afghani community in Shepparton identified that their young people are disengaged. There is a significant number of young males drop out from the high school due to lack of support from their families. They were either pushed to join work force to support the family and parents don't see the value of the education.

Mosque

The community has had a long term vision of constructing their own mosque and have raised in excess of \$1 million and engaged a builder to develop the project which commenced in mid-2013 and is almost complete however is already being used.

Community Centre

Community has a need of a community centre. Mosque is considered as a place of worship only. However Mosque is happy for the community use their land to build a separate community centre.

Home Ownership

Many Afghanis' have purchased or built a house and home ownership is seen as an essential part of permanent settlement. Some families will pool their money together to buy a house. ⁴

Renting

Afghani community members predominately renting properties through private landlords. They have trouble when applying for rental properties through real estate agents as they need to provide a rental history. To keep rental costs down up to 12 people will live in the one property.

The challenge of applying for private rental without a rental history was described as a community problem as was the perception of discrimination and assumption by property managers that large families will cause damage to rental properties. Language was seen as a barrier to accessing rental properties and all communities are seeking further information on rights and responsibilities in the public and private rental systems.

Burial Site

The community identified an appropriate Muslim burial site as a priority issue as they were concerned at the cost and format of burials at the Shepparton Cemetery where other Muslim communities were catered for. In negotiation with Greater Shepparton Council the community assisted in the design and development of a site at the Kialla West cemetery and several interments have occurred.

Community Support

Due to the language issues of first language illiteracy and limited written and comprehension skills in English many Afghans need support to complete forms, undertake commercial transactions and access various agencies and services. The community preference is for the employment of an Afghan specific worker to provide ongoing community assistance.

Information sessions to support community needs could include Australian culture, Family Law, violence, career pathways, health, computer literacy, Centrelink, Medicare, purchasing property, consumer rights, local government, civil and criminal law and specific training courses.

Intergenerational Changes

The communities expressed their frustration and dismay regarding the freedom provided to young people in the Australian culture and the loss of their parental influence. The communities explained that in their homeland, children remain part of the family unit, under strict parental control, until they are at least 21 years. They now raise their children in a culture that provides children with independence and freedom at a much younger age.⁴

Many parents are concerned that their children are rapidly changing and they fear a loss of culture, identity and respect for parents. The community needs to bring a spiritual

leader to Shepparton to support families and young people. There needs to be a range of sporting activities appropriate for young people to participate.

Young people expressed frustration with the strictness of family life.⁴

On occasion Family violence has occurred and come to the attention of Victoria Police and Child Protection although the level of incidence is well below the occurrence in the mainstream community which suggests an issue of under reporting.

When these issues occur Community Leaders are the first response and other authorities will become involved if the threat increases.

The community identifies contributing factors to family violence as:

- Culture shock from adapting to a new way of life.
- Differing systems from Afghanistan to Australia.
- Family frustration at the loss of culture, language and tradition as younger generation assimilates to Australian culture and systems.
- Loss of parental influence.
- Lack of knowledge about supports and assistance if family violence is an issue.

All new arrival communities have expressed concern at their lack of knowledge or understanding of the Child Protection systems which they view as more favourable to their children and do not respect the rights of families. They are seeking more information on the capacity to discipline children and impose family curfews. There is concern that children who leave the family home bring shame to the family and community.

Involvement with the Police⁴

There is a strong belief in the Afghani culture that what happens in the home, stays in the home. Since there is a great shame on the family and whole community to involve police, they generally avoid doing this and try to resolve the issue within the family. If this doesn't work they involve their community leaders and as a last resort, the Police.

Education

Parents indicate a concern that the school system does not adequately involve them in the school processes and that the schools could be more culturally appropriate and

inclusive. Language is a huge barrier for parents as is literacy and parental education as they find it difficult to assist their children with studies and homework.

The Law

There is a lack of awareness around rules, regulations and the law.

The community would not go to a Court or a Tribunal to resolve a matter as they hold negative perceptions of the court. Everybody in the community would talk about them if they saw them at court. They associate court with jail.

The community is lacking awareness of the roles of various agencies involved in legal processes such as the Sheriff, local government and fine enforcement and collection.

¹ The Association of Hazaras in Victoria, www.bamyan.org.au

² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/summary.htm>

http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/afghanistan/afghanistan_country_brief.html

³ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Afghani Community Profile, www.immi.gov.au

⁴ Issues raised in community consultation in conjunction with GO TAFE, Victoria Police, Department of Justice & Regulation and Department Health and Human Services.

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan>