



Information sheet for school staff in response to the current crisis in Afghanistan – August 2021

What is the current situation in Afghanistan?

On the 15th August 2021, after 20 years of U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan, the Taliban have occupied Kabul (after taking their first provincial capital on 6 August 2021).

Thousands of people have fled their homes and are seeking refuge where they can.

Many people had already fled to seek refuge in Kabul after 6 August as it was perceived to be safer and within U.S. control.

The United Nations estimates that as many as 18 million Afghans—nearly half the country's population—need urgent humanitarian aid, including food and housing.

What was it like living under Taliban rule?

The Taliban were in control of Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. During this time, they enforced their own version of Islamic Law where ethnic minorities and women experienced significant persecution. The Taliban were accused of various human rights violations and cultural abuses during this time.

Women experienced significant persecution under the Taliban. Girls aged 10+ were not allowed to seek education, females had to have a male accompany them when they went outside and females experienced public flogging and execution.

Ethnic minority groups, particularly Hazara people, have also faced significant persecution under the Taliban.

Currently the Taliban are vowing to seek no retribution against their opponents, and to respect Afghan women and minority groups. Many are sceptical of these claims and fear the return of the laws that were in place prior to 2001.

What does this mean for Afghan students in Australia?

Firstly, people affected by this crisis may identify as other nationalities than Afghan. People's experience of persecution under Taliban rule cannot be contained to people who were born or lived in Afghanistan.

Many people who were born in Pakistan and Iran have significant ties to Afghanistan as families who fled 20 years ago sought refuge in other countries, including Iran and Pakistan.

Families and individuals who had dreams of returning to Afghanistan and building a life there now have little hope that this dream will be realised.

The crisis and escalation will be distressing and may be re-triggering for families who fled Afghanistan and who have families residing there, which in turn will be distressing for children and young people.

Afghan people in Brisbane are concerned about their families in Afghanistan and have many questions around how they can support them and help them escape to safety.

There have been terrifying images and video coming out of Kabul which young people and their families will have seen.

Those who have current refugee status applications with the Department of Home Affairs are being advised to seek legal advice. These events may significantly impact legal processes and will add another layer of distress for them.

These events will affect Afghan nationals in Australia who are seeking refugee status through Australia's onshore protection program, as well as individuals who are seeking to bring family members to Australia. There is grave uncertainty around the immediate and ongoing safety of people in Afghanistan.

The refugee and settlement sector are advocating for Afghans currently in Australia on temporary protection visas (people seeking asylum) to be granted permanent protection in Australia. At this stage, the Australian Government has stated they will not take this step.

How might students respond?

Behaviours to look out for

- Increased anxiety
- Grief/ sadness
- Distracted
- Low mood with less enjoyment of everyday activities

Trauma responses

- Re-triggering of past traumatic experiences
- Hypervigilance – on alert for any sounds or movement
- Unable to concentrate and easily distracted
- A sense of hopelessness

What can you do to support students and families?

- For students exhibiting signs of stress, check on their wellbeing and offer options of support (e.g. leaving the classroom and talking with a trusted adult or alternative calming activities in the classroom)
- Allow students time out of class when needed
- Discuss opportunities for extensions with students
- Consider modified homework due to reduced capacity at home (e.g. the student might be required to be doing more domestic duties, supporting family members emotionally)
- Provide a wellbeing or safe/quiet space for them to go (either in or outside the classroom)
- Plan for impacts on concentration and memory (e.g. repeating instructions, small chunks of information, more time to complete classroom activities)
- Offer and share wellbeing strategies and practices, and consider who the student might want to talk with (**Skills Suggestions** attached)
- Consider whole of classroom activities and routines that promote a calm, predictable and supportive environment
- Where possible use bi-cultural support and resources in the student's first language
- Engage services to support discussions (e.g. QPASTT, Multicultural Australia, ACCESS, World Wellness Group, RAILS for legal assistance)
- Remain informed and keep abreast of developments in the situation in Afghanistan

Further Resources for Schools and Teachers

The Schools in for Refugees resource by Foundation House in Victoria has developed new resources for teachers and schools to support students and families during this crisis:

[Supporting students and families of Afghan background](#) - PDF

Many students and families of Afghan background living in Victoria are currently experiencing trauma because of the events unfolding in Afghanistan. Furthermore, this is a difficult time for school staff supporting students in a remote learning environment. This resource provides schools with important information about how they can support their students and families of Afghan background who are experiencing high levels of distress.



Schools Briefing: Supporting students and families of Afghan Background - VIDEO

Many Victorian students and families of Afghan background are currently experiencing trauma because of the events unfolding in Afghanistan. This recorded briefing provides schools with important information about how they can support their students and families of Afghan background.

Q&A with Zabi Mazoor on supporting Afghan Students and Families - VIDEO

Zabi Mazoori, Foundation House's Community Project Worker with the COVID Mental Health Response Project shares what schools can be doing at this time to support their students and families of Afghan background and advice for teachers with Afghan background students.

Current Advocacy and Fundraising Campaigns (a sample list)

- [Initiative led by the Refugee Council of Australia](#)
Over 300 organisations, businesses, and community groups call on all Parliamentarians to respond to the crisis in Afghanistan
- [Queensland Afghan Community Association](#)
- [UNHCR Fundraising for emergency support for displaced Afghans](#)
- [SADAQA Welfare Fund Emergency Appeal](#)
- [Baba Mazari Foundation has partnered with World Hazara Council, Hazara International and Hazara Committee in the UK](#)
- [Summary - how to help Afghanistan](#)

For further support

Contact QPASTT

admin@qpastt.org.au

07 3391 6677

Contact HEAL

heal@qpastt.org.au

07 3391 6677