

# QUALIFICATIONS FROM AFGHANISTAN



Guide for  
credential evaluators

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

# **QUALIFICATIONS FROM AFGHANISTAN**

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# Foreword

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**A**fter the United States and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan and with the Taliban takeover of the country in 2021, the current state and future of education in this country remains uncertain. In this situation, it is essential for the community of credential evaluators to have access to updated information and the opportunity to share their experiences and best practices for the assessment of qualifications from Afghanistan. Keeping in mind the growing numbers of the EQPR candidates with qualifications from Afghanistan and in order to meet the needs of the credential evaluators in the ENIC-NARIC networks and beyond, the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) launched the Afghanistan task force in autumn 2021.

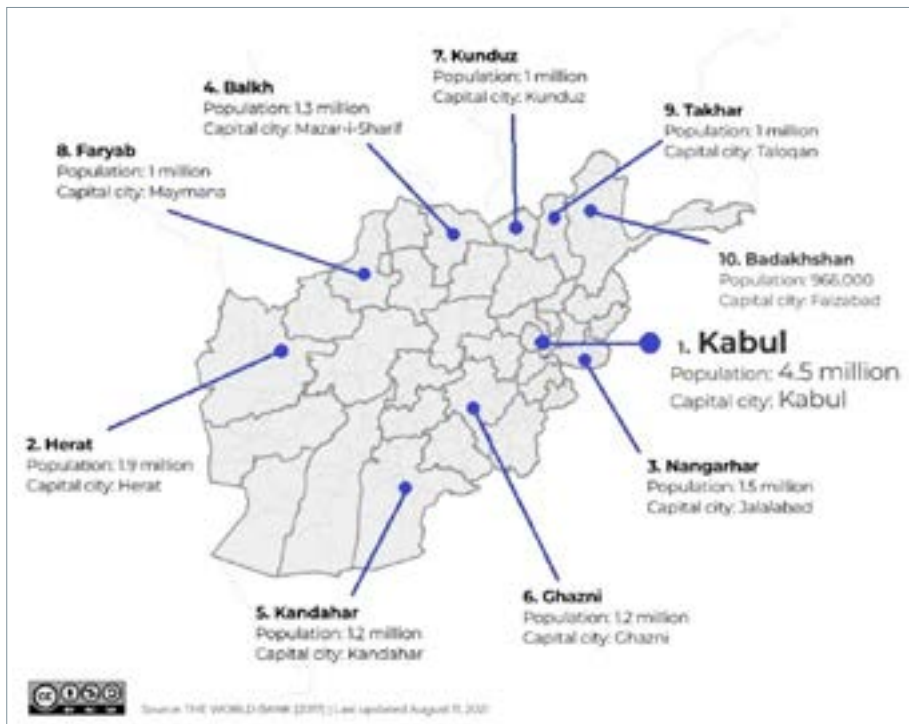
The objectives of the Afghanistan task force were to summarise recent developments in the country and provide analysis of how these changes impact the system of education and, consequently, the recognition of qualifications from Afghanistan. The joint work of the ENIC-NARIC centres of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom and Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc (ECE) from the United States under the guidance of the Council of Europe EQPR project team, resulted in the development of the present guide to support credential evaluators around the world in their work with the assessment of qualifications from Afghanistan.

This guide contains the historical overview and analysis of the latest developments in the system of education in Afghanistan, information about the available resources, lists of the educational institutions (as of autumn 2021) and examples of good practice when assessing qualifications from Afghanistan.



# 1. Afghanistan – Geography and People

(by Henry Huggett, UKENIC)



**Official name:** The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

**Location:** Afghanistan is located in Central Asia, north and west of Pakistan, east of Iran, and south of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

**Population:** 29,1 million

**Ethnic groups:** Pashtun (42%); Tajik (27%); Hazara (9%); Uzbek (9%); Aimak (a Persian-speaking nomadic group) (4%); Turkmen (3%); and Baloch (2%).

**Languages:** The official languages are Dari (Afghan Persian) and Pashtu. Dari is spoken by 50 % of the population, and Pashtu is spoken as a first language by 35 %. Turkic languages (primarily Turkmen and Uzbek) are spoken by 11 % of the population. Many Afghans speak more than one language; Dari is the most common second language.

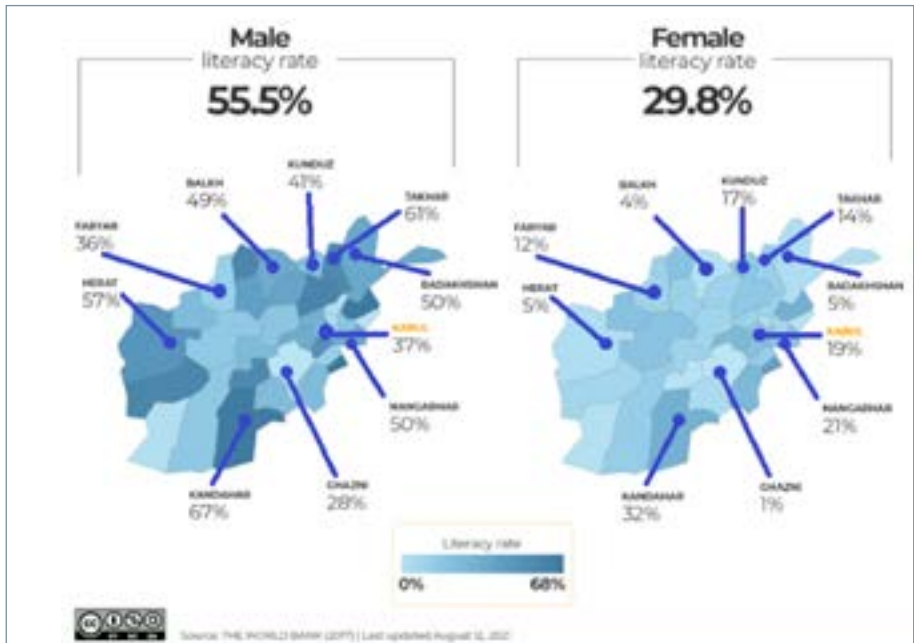
**Religion:** Islam (Sunni)



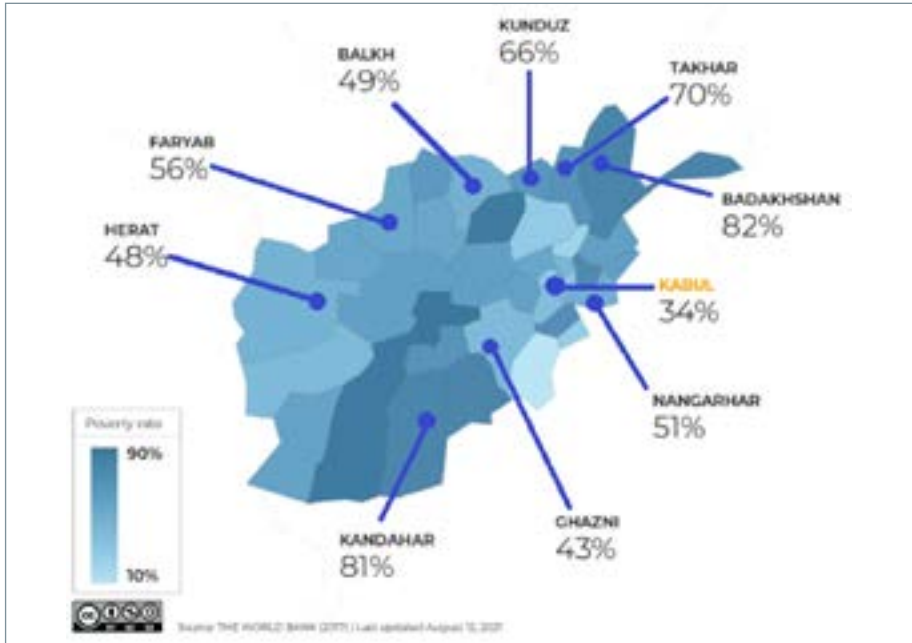
**389,645 internally displaced people:** From January to July 2021, three quarters of displaced people in Afghanistan came from just 10 of the 34 provinces.



**Very low literacy rates:** Following decades of war, literacy rates in Afghanistan are amongst the lowest in the world.



**Most Afghans live in poverty:** Before the coronavirus pandemic, at least 54.5% of the country lived below the poverty line, with current estimates now reaching up to 72%.



**2.6 million refugees worldwide:** 86% of registered refugees live in three of Afghanistan's neighbouring countries, with an additional 12% living in Europe.





## 2. Historic Overview and Recent Developments in the Education System of Afghanistan

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### 2.1. History of Education in Afghanistan

(by Amy M. Ullrich, Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc (ECE))

**T**he history of modern education in Afghanistan is new – and complex – as its policies have changed quickly with the ebbs and flows of competing leaders/ regimes, external involvement, and war.

Islamic and traditional education in Afghanistan has a long history: many study the Koran, Sharia law, values, customs, and vocational skills at home, from a mullah at a madrasa, or in a mosque. Islamic education was only for boys, and girls were only able to learn from willing brothers or fathers. The first two formal schools of modern education were established just before the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1868-1878). Shortly thereafter, the *Lisa Habibia* (لیسا حبیبی) and *Maktab-e Harbiya* (مکتبہ ہاربیہ) secondary schools were established in Kabul (1903-1909).

There was much development to Afghanistan's education sector in the early 20th century. King Amanullah Khan, an advocate for women's education and influenced by progress in Turkey, opened Afghanistan's first school for girls in 1921. Germany and France offered financial and curriculum support to the country; male and female Afghani students were sent abroad for higher education to Turkey, Germany, and France. This decade (1919-1929) also included compulsory primary school for all, and the Ministry of Education was established in Kabul. Additionally, modern education started to reach Afghans outside of Kabul in other large cities and rural areas.

Though much progress was made by King Amanullah Khan, he was not popular with conservative mullahs and was exiled in 1929 for his views and policies regarding the education of females. Habibullah Kalakani quickly took over – revoking Khan's

advancements in female education and student scholarship abroad, saying that it was contrary to Sharia law. However, just as quickly as Kalakani backtracked educational progress, when Mohammed Nadir Shah (Khan) assumed power, girls' schools were reopened, and progress was made in the establishment of higher education institutions. During his rule, Kabul University was founded in 1932 with the establishment of the Kabul Medical Faculty (now known as Kabul University of Medical Sciences Abu Ali Ibn Sina / انیس نبی علم عو با لباک یب ط مول ع نو تن هو پ).

The government of Afghanistan made Kabul University's growth a high priority from the university's creation (1932) until the Soviet Occupation of 1979. By 1968, Kabul University was a top research university in Central Asia and attracted foreign students, researchers, and professors from the "Middle East, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and the United States" (Kabul University n.d.).

The almost decade-long Soviet-Afghan War and occupation (1979-1989) ushered in communist and pro-Soviet ideas; education continued to be inclusive of both men and women. Secondary education was reduced from 12 to 10 years – aligning with the Soviet system during this period. During this Cold War-era proxy war, Afghans experienced pro-communist education from the USSR in the form of curriculum propaganda and scholarships for 1,500 Afghan students to attend Soviet institutions of higher education each year. Fearing for the Soviet indoctrination of Afghans, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia agreed to provide aid to Afghanistan and the mujahedeen fighters. With this aid, "the Islamist leaders in Pakistan were able to build many radicalised [madrasas] among the Afghan refugee camps along the Afghan border, which helped indoctrinate students to become jihadist warriors" (Shirazi, 2008, p. 221). Many of these students were refugees along the Afghanistan-Pakistan Northwest Frontier Province border, who had left Soviet-controlled schools and turned to Islamic madrasas for education.

Upon the collapse of communist regime in 1992, many Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran established their own educational institutions – secondary and tertiary as well as Islamic and secular. Kabul University suffered much conflict and destruction with the beginning of Afghanistan's civil war. In 1996, with the Taliban's capture of Kabul, female university students were no longer allowed to attend school or teach. From 1996-2001, educational progress not only came to a halt, but it regressed as the Taliban regime closed all girls' schools, banned all females from education, and converted many existing schools into religious madrasas. The only opportunity that remained for some women was through the Kabul Medical Faculty, as women during this period were only allowed to receive care from female medical staff. Some girls and women studied secretly in their homes due to the prohibition of their education.

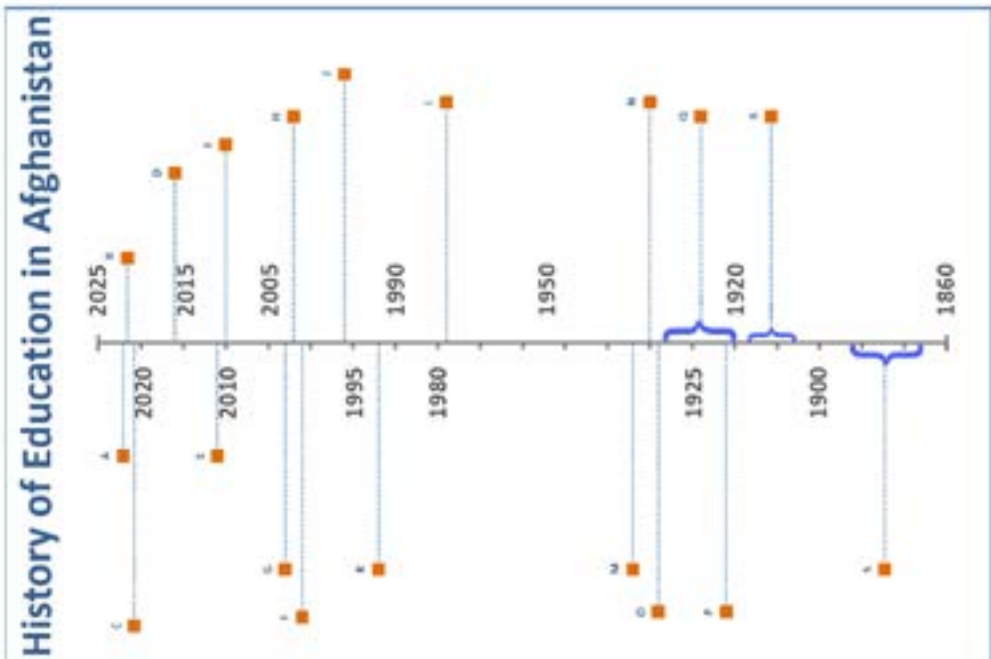
The United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001, to fight the Taliban and al-Qaida, as well as to assist Afghanistan in the redevelopment of the country and its political system. President Hamid Karzai was elected in December 2001 schools and training centres began opening to males and females again. Where art, music, history, geography, and foreign languages had been removed from primary and secondary curriculum under the Taliban, the new government re-established a more balanced and comprehensive curriculum. Kabul Education University was established in 2002 to help fill the need for trained teachers in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's private sector of education has been another area of development in the past 20 years. Kardan Institute of Higher Education (now Kardan University / نادرک نوتن هوپ) was established in 2003 as the first private higher education institution. By 2010, 29 more private higher education institutions were established – by 2016, there were 70. As of August 2021, there were 39 public/government and 128 private higher education institutions in Afghanistan.

## 2.2. History of Education in Afghanistan: Timeline

(by Amy M. Ullrich, Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc (ECE))

Label	Year	Event
A	September 2025	Ministry of Higher Education (MHE) certifies that education must be recognized by gender/origin/religion to school, secondary girls' are not allowed to refer to school, women may attend universities only if in same gender classrooms with female instructors
B	August 2012	Taliban restricts women in Afghanistan, US withdraws troops and all military personnel, all educational institutions are closed, large cohort of ISAF students enrolls to degree and long
C	2010	Germany closes all 21 military (Government ISAF) and US (Private ISAF)
D	2010	79 Private ISAF sites in operation
E	2011	American University of Afghanistan (AUA) starts the first MBA program in Afghanistan
F	2010	39 Private Higher Education Institutions (HIs) are now in operation throughout Afghanistan
G	2008	Kandahar Institute of Higher Education (Kandahar Institute) is the first private higher education institution to be established in Afghanistan
H	2007	Kabul Education University is established
I	2005	U.S. teaches Afghanistan to fight the Taliban and of Quality Presidential Award Karezai elected, schools and teaching centers begin to open to males and females
J	1996	Taliban regime ends 2002, educational progress halts as the regime banned all females from education, closure of girls' schools, except the Kabul Medical Faculty, number of religious institutions increased & many existing schools were transformed into madrassah
K	1997	College of communication regime, many Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran establish their own educational institutions
L	2019	Taliban Occupation, education development continues, but only in rural government cities
M	1917	Kabul University is founded as the first university in Afghanistan with the establishment of Kabul Medical Faculty (now known as Kabul University of Medical Sciences)
N	1910	1910s rise rate of madrassah schools (Madrassahs), schools are recognized and progress is made in the establishment of higher education institutions
O	1929	King Amanullah Khan is elected for his reign & pushes an female education, madrassahs, Madrasah takes over, and creates their's madrassahs to female education, ending B's secondary to 10-year old
P	1915	Advocate for women's education, King Amanullah Khan, opens schools for girls and sends female students abroad for higher education
Q	1950-1970	Primary school made compulsory for all & Ministry of Education (MOE) established
R	1997-2000	Five Taliban & Mullahs marriage secondary schools are established in Kabul
S	1868-1878	19 of 7 formal schools of modern education established in Afghanistan



## 2.3. Recent Developments in the Country and their Implications on the Education Sector, with a Particular Focus on Higher Education

(by Marius Jensen, NOKUT)

After the recent US/NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan and with the Taliban takeover of the country, the future of the education sector is yet again uncertain. The impact of Taliban policies on the education sector during their rule from 1996 to 2001 has not been forgotten. The Taliban, who follow the Wahabi and Deobandi views of Islam, have restrictive reformatory views on the roles of women, music, secular curriculum, and more at schools. Upon their takeover in 1995, only religious schools (madrasas) were allowed for boys; schools for girls were completely closed. Afghanistan had few public universities and no private universities from 1996 to 2001—learning was based on non-scientific curriculum.

Afghanistan had major advancements in its educational sector, after toppling the Taliban in 2001. The total enrolment in primary education rose from an estimate of 0,9 million to 9,3 million in the years 2001 – 2015. The proportion of girls' enrolment rose from zero to 39%.

After the take-over the Taliban in mid-August of 2021, one of the predominant fears is all progresses of the past 20 years will be reversed. Although the Taliban has made several statements prior to the takeover to “reassure” the public in Afghanistan—and perhaps, more importantly, the international community—concerning girls' access to education, many remain skeptical. The skepticism is not unfounded; much has changed from when it was decided that the international forces were leaving Afghanistan until the Taliban seized power. According to some statements prior to seizing power, the Taliban expressed that the education system—higher education, in particular—would not be harmed, but rather strengthened. Additionally, there were promises of not going back to the policies of the 1990's, in which girls were not allowed access to education. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid pledged “women would have rights to education and work.” Another spokesman, Suhail Shaheen, said in an interview: “We are committed to women's rights, to education, to work and to freedom of speech, in the light of our Islamic rules.” However, only a month after seizing power, the Taliban ordered the re-opening of secondary education of grades 7-12 only for boys. Male teachers were ordered back to schools, but female teachers and girls were ordered to stay at home for “security” reasons. Some in-country observers have noted that despite the Taliban's “favorable” view on girls attending higher education, girls unable to finish secondary education would be prevented from accessing higher education.

Taliban views on higher education have become clearer as they assume more control of the country. According to some reports, the newly appointed Minister of Higher Education, Abdul Baqi Haqqani, has declared that “universities and degrees have no importance” compared to religious scholars of the Taliban. Included in media remarks in September 2021, Haqqani stated “mullahs are better than a doctor or a master. You see the mullahs and Taliban that are in the power have no PhD, MA or even a high school degree, but are the greatest of all.”<sup>1</sup>

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1. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20210909084220729>



According to the article by University World News, the Taliban's Ministry of Higher Education has issued official decree No 146 stating the segregation of female and male students in all public universities and private institutions of higher education; furthermore, they stated female students should be taught by female professors. Additionally, University World News reported Nilofar Ayoubi, a women's right activist, stated "this is the start of limiting girls' education... eventually the Taliban will end up banning girls from schools and universities." Ayoubi continued, "as we all know we do not have enough female teachers. And, finally, they will say that due to the lack of women teachers, girls should sit at home." Regardless of the intentions (to exclude women or not), the policies will put constraints on the educational system in its entirety.

Kabul University professor, Arif Bahram, stated "the segregation would face problems such as lack of classrooms, lack of professors, and laboratory equipment..." The shortage of academic staff, both male and female, has worsened since many professionals and academic staff have fled the country because of the Taliban takeover.

The educational system in Afghanistan for the past 20 years has been heavily dependent on international funding and economic support. According to a UK Aid briefing document by Philip Loft and Claire Miles, since 2001 some 60 billion dollars (USD) have been given to Afghanistan in aid in development funds by both the United States and the United Kingdom—in which the U.S. has been the largest donor. A significant portion of the fund has been spent on higher education in Afghanistan.

An article published by University World News states that despite the large sums spent on higher education in Afghanistan, it still relies on foreign assistance. Furthermore, the articles note that the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund's latest partnership programme had pledged some 100 million dollars for higher education in Afghanistan for 2021 – 2024.

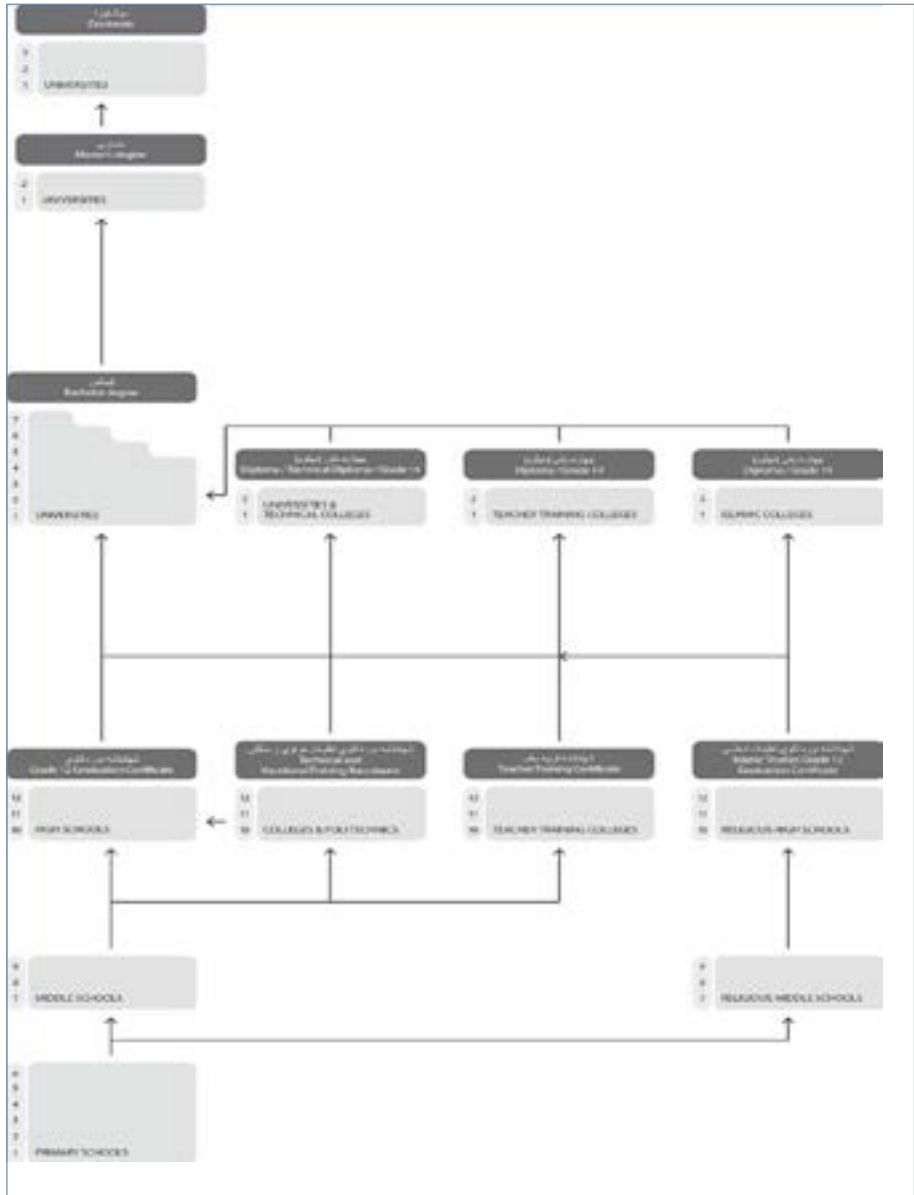
Unfortunately, the support from international donors is now at risk and it is unclear whether the international community will support higher education in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. Farhat Asif, President of the Institute of Peace and Diplomatic Studies, told the University World News "a non-inclusive government by the Taliban, having no women's representation, will likely lead to disapproval by donors and partners..." Farhat's fear is not unfounded as the International Monetary Fund, the U.S.-Biden administration, the World Bank, and the European Union have decided to halt development assistance "until we clarify the situation," as expressed by Josep Borrell Fontelles, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

In summary, the future of the educational sector in Afghanistan does not look promising. Despite the Taliban pledge of not "harming but strengthening" it, all evidence points to the opposite. The primary victims of the current situation are girls and women, but the Taliban policies will have an impact on Afghanistan's entire educational system. The policies will lead to shortages in funds and resources for a system already fragile and heavily dependent on international aid. It is highly likely that the curriculum of higher education will change to become more in "accordance with Islamic culture."

# 3. System of Education

## 3.1. Afghanistan Education System Chart

(by Mohammed Hatia, UK ENIC and Marius Jensen, NOKUT)



## 3.2. Afghanistan Education System: Levels, Degrees, Grading

(by Mohammed Hatia, UK ENIC and Marius Jensen, NOKUT)

The Ministry of Education in Afghanistan is responsible for school education, general education and vocational education.

Education is compulsory for children aged 6-14. Primary school, lower secondary school and higher secondary school are the three stages of general education.

### Primary School Education

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Grades 1 to 6 - Primary education lasts for six years, for ages 6 to 12.

Schools are divided into two three-year cycles. Islamic education is provided from grade 1 to 12 in religious schools (Madrasas/ مدرسدم and Dar-ul-Huffaz / ظافحلاراد).

### Secondary School Education

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Upon completion of primary education, children must pass an entrance examination to gain admission to secondary education.

Students who pass the entrance examination enter secondary education. Secondary education is divided into two cycles - both three years in length:

#### **Lower Secondary Education/ مطس و تم بتكم**

Grades 7 to 9 - Lower secondary education or middle school (Maktabeh Motevaseteh / مطس و تم بتكم), which is compulsory and free for pupils.

#### **Upper Secondary Education/ ىل اع هرود**

Grades 10 to 12 - Upper secondary education or high school (Doreyeh Aali / ىل اع هرود).

Students between the ages of 16 and 19 attend high schools. Upper secondary education is provided by the following types of secondary schools:

- ▶ General education: high schools or secondary schools for boys and high school or secondary schools for girls.
- ▶ Vocational education: high schools or secondary schools for boys and high schools or secondary schools for girls.
- ▶ Islamic education: high schools or secondary schools for boys and high schools or secondary schools for girls.

Upon completion of grade 12, students in all academic and vocational streams sit for the Baccalauria examinations.

Upon completion of the Higher Secondary School, students are awarded the 12th grade Graduation Certificate. This award is issued as a trilingual certificate comprising of the following languages: English, Pashtu, Dari.

High school graduates from general education high schools can sit for university entrance examinations (Kankor) and can apply for all available undergraduate programmes.

High school graduates from Islamic high schools can also sit for university entrance examinations but can enroll only in faculties of theology.

## Technical and Vocational Education

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Technical and vocational education is available at secondary and post-secondary level.

### **Secondary**

At secondary level, technical and vocational education is provided in schools under the Ministry of Education (MoE). The duration of programmes varies between two and five years, depending on the entry level and field of specialisation.

### **Post-Secondary**

At post-secondary level, vocational education (grades 13 and 14) is offered in technical colleges (technicums), teacher training colleges and Islamic colleges (Dar-ul-Ulums / مولانا راد).

### **Technical Certificate**

Technical and vocational schools and post-secondary schools admit students who have completed middle school and train them for six years in specific fields.

Upon completion of the vocational post-secondary courses (end of grade 14), students are awarded a technical certificate which represents two years of study beyond Baccalauria level.

Upon completion, graduates of grade 14 receive a diploma or an associate degree. Graduates normally enter the labour market, but they are also entitled to sit for university entrance exams (Kankor / روکناک) and apply for university courses.

### **Short-Term Courses**

Other institutions, such as those regulated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, offer short-term vocational training courses aiming to provide professional skills in line with social and economic needs.

### **Higher Education**

Higher education in Afghanistan is provided by universities, polytechnics, pedagogical institutes and medical schools. The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) is responsible for the training of secondary and higher education teachers.

The academic year: 36 weeks

Number of semesters: two semesters

In order to enter higher education in Afghanistan, students must complete the Baccalauria and succeed in the competitive university entrance examination, the Kankor.

The Kankor is a single nationwide examination which is administered by the Ministry of Higher Education.

There are four stages of university qualifications: Diploma (م.پ.د), Bachelor degree/ Licence (سناسیل), Master's degree (یرتسام) and Doctorate (اروتکد).

### **Diploma/** دپلوما

Diploma is a two-year undergraduate qualification, which is offered by community colleges. It prepares students for technician-level positions in various professions. Professions include nursing, teaching and engineering. Under the proposed credit system, a diploma will require the completion of 80 credits.

### **Bachelor's degree/Licence/** سناسیونل

Bachelor's degree courses are offered by universities, technological and pedagogical institutes and colleges.

- ▶ Bachelor degrees (or Licence) - four years.
- ▶ Engineering and veterinary medicine degrees - five years.
- ▶ Degrees in medicine - seven years (includes one year of pre-medical studies and one-year internship).

### **Master's degrees/** یرتسنام

There are only a few private institutions able to offer postgraduate qualifications. Master degrees duration is two years.

Subjects offered at Master's level are:

- ▶ Architecture
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Engineering
- ▶ Humanities
- ▶ Law
- ▶ Natural sciences
- ▶ Psychology
- ▶ Social sciences

### **Doctorate/** اروتکد

There are only a few private institutions that offer Doctorate courses.

Doctorate courses: three years

They may generally be offered in the following subjects:

- ▶ Architecture
- ▶ Arts
- ▶ Engineering
- ▶ Natural sciences
- ▶ Social sciences

### **Teacher Education**

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Teachers are recruited at two levels: central and provincial. Only teachers recruited through the Ministry of Education (MoE) receive permanent status. Teachers recruited at the provincial level are 'contracted' teachers. Graduates of the two-year Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) are required to teach for four years. Those graduating from universities (degree programmes) are required to teach for eight years.

## Teachers at Secondary Middle School level

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On completion of high school (grade 12), students follow a two-year training course at a teacher training institution.

## Teachers at High School level

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High school teachers are required to hold a four-year Bachelor of Education. Students with high grades who have completed the two-year teaching course may progress to take the final two years at university to obtain Bachelor of Education degree.

## Grading

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### **Grading in schools until 1976**

Marking was on a scale of 0-10 with a minimum pass-mark of 3.5 and a maximum pass mark of 10. The minimum average is 50% of the sum of the highest marks for all subjects.

### **Grading in schools since 1976**

Marking is based on a percentage scale from 1 to 100. Minimum pass-mark is 40% for individual subjects. The minimum average is 50 % of the sum of the highest marks for all subjects.

### **Grading in Higher Education**

Grading at this level uses numerical scores with a range of 1 to 100. A mark of 50 is the minimum passing score for an individual course. Some higher education institutions use a combined percentage grade, letter grade and GPA grading system.

## 3.3. Qualification Titles and Abbreviation of Degrees used by HEIs

*(by Mohammed Hatia, UK ENIC)*

The following list displays abbreviations of the degrees issued within the higher education system of Afghanistan.

A.D.	Associate degree (in technical, vocational, professional fields)
B.A.	Bachelor of Arts
B.B.A	Bachelor of Business Administration
B.Com (Hons)	Bachelor of Commerce (Honours)
B.D.S.	Bachelor of Dental Surgery
B.E.	Bachelor of Engineering
B.Ed. (Hons)	Bachelor of Education (Honours)
B.F.A.	Bachelor of Fine Arts
B.Pharm	Bachelor of Pharmacy

B.Sc.	Bachelor of Science
B.Sc (Engg.)	Bachelor of Science (Engineering)
B.Sc (Hons)	Bachelor of Science (Honours)
B.Tech	Bachelor of Technology
D.V.M.	Doctor of Veterinary Medicine
LL.B	Bachelor of Law
LL.M	Master of Law
M.B.A.	Master of Business Administration
M.B.B.S.	Bachelor of Medicine & Bachelor of Surgery
M.D.	Doctor of Medicine
M.E.	Master of Engineering
M.Ed.	Master of Education
M.F.A	Master of Fine Arts
M.L.S.	Master of Library Sciences
M.P.A.	Master of Public Administration
M.PH	Master of Public Health
M.Pharm	Master of Pharmacy
M.Phil	Master of Philosophy
M.S./M.Sc.	Master of Science
MSc (Hons)	Master of Science (Honours)
M.Tech	Master of Technology
Pharm.D.	Doctor of Pharmacy
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy

## 4. Responsible Governing Bodies

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(by José Pras, NUFFIC)

**T**he Ministry of Education (MoE) ([Home | Ministry of Education \(moe.gov.af\)](#)) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) ([Home | ښوونځي عاليه وزارت \(mohe.gov.af\)](#)) are responsible for the entire education system.

The MoE is responsible for all the education provided after primary education, including religious education and technical and secondary vocational training (TVET) up to class 14.

The MoE identifies three main topics of concern and improvement:

- ▶ Safety and easy access to education
- ▶ Quality of the curricula and the education level of teachers
- ▶ Management at central and provincial levels.

The MoHE is responsible for higher education. It assures the quality of public universities. The MoHE initiated the setup of an accreditation process, and in 2011 the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Directorate (QAAD) [Quality Assurance and Accreditation \(qaad.edu.af\)](#) was established. The QAAD aims at meeting international standards in higher education by improving the quality in all higher education institutions. Its task is to administer and oversee the accreditation process. Under the administration of the QAAD, internal and external quality assurance processes have been implemented. Universities can apply for different stages of accreditation. Several have already been awarded full accreditation, and many are in the initial or second phase of accreditation. The directorate also assists in capacity building for faculties and staff, and quality improvement.

Technical and Vocational Education is administered by the Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) Authority ([Home | ټيكنيكي او ښوونځي عاليه وزارت \(tveta.gov.af\)](#)). There are also other public TVET institutions which are under the authority of other government ministries.

Education in Midwifery and Physiotherapy is supervised by the Ministry of Public Health ([Home | Ministry of Public Health \(moph.gov.af\)](#)).

The Ministry of Interior ([Home | AfGOV \(moi.gov.af\)](#)) oversees the police force. It issues diplomas from the National Police Academy.





# 5. Experiences with the Evaluation of Qualifications from Afghanistan

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**T**his part contains information about how qualifications from Afghanistan are being assessed by ENIC-NARICs from Germany, Italy, Norway, Netherlands, UK and US (ECE) taking into consideration the context in autumn 2021 - winter 2022.

## 5.1. Netherlands: Processing Qualifications from Afghanistan – Current Developments and Observations at NUFFIC

*(by José Pras, NUFFIC)*

In January-November 2021, NUFFIC processed 104 applications from Afghanistan, compared to 74 for the same period last year. All the applicants were already in the Netherlands before August 2021. NUFFIC expects the increase of applications from newly arrived Afghans starting in the beginning of 2022, as most of them are still proceeding with their asylum applications as of autumn 2021. Expected numbers of upcoming applications for assessment for 2022 could add up to over a thousand.

So far, applicants seem to be able to submit all the required documents, including final degree certificate and transcripts, both for higher education qualifications and secondary school certificates (that is, the final diploma and the transcript). In many cases, they are also legalised by the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

For applicants who cannot submit any credentials, NUFFIC has developed an alternative type of evaluation Education Level Indicator (ION). ION evaluation contains a description of the education that the applicant claims to have obtained and gives a general comparison of the qualification to the Dutch system.

In general, the evaluation procedure is based on the copies of the credentials. If at any point there are doubts about the authenticity of the documents, the applicant is asked to submit the original credentials, but only if he/she is already in the

Netherlands. NUFFIC performs technical (forensic) examination of the documents and writes a report on the outcome of the results. An increasing number of these technical examinations is expected in the coming months. This will contribute to a better understanding of the issuance and appearance of credentials from Afghanistan.

Alongside this examination, NUFFIC always attempts to contact the higher education institution for a request of graduation verification, which involves receiving permission of the applicant. Since most of the applicants are refugees, this is often not possible.

NUFFIC might contact the applicant and ask for additional clarification or explanation of his specific situation.

Problems that NUFFIC most often encounters are:

- ▶ No response from authorities when trying to contact them for verification.
- ▶ A discrepancy between the date of birth on the diploma, and the date of birth on the i.d. (whether the Afghan passport or the Dutch identification-card).

## **5.2. United States: Best Practices and Procedures for Evaluating Credentials from Afghanistan at Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc. (ECE)**

*(by Amy M. Ullrich, Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc (ECE))*

1. ECE has multiple documentation requirements for academic credentials from Afghanistan depending on the method of verification that is used.
  - a. If the process of verification is completed by the applicant through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Afghanistan *and* a Consulate/Embassy of Afghanistan in the U.S. or Canada, ECE requires the original document to be submitted for review. This method is specifically used for documents issued by the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan but is also acceptable for post-secondary documents and vocational training certificates.
  - b. If the process of verification is completed “in-house” via ECE contact with the issuing higher education institution, then complete colour scans/virtual copies are accepted.
2. Whether the credentials are submitted as originals or emailed scans, the documents are reviewed by ECE’s team of Documentation Specialists, who identify and note any forensic features, and scan them into ECE’s system if received through regular mail.
3. The Credential Evaluator assigned to the case will review the documents presented and compare them to ECE’s archive of credentials, which have been verified authentic by their issuing institutions.
4. If the verification process is being completed “in-house,” the assigned Credential Evaluator will look to our Verification Contact Database for recently used contact information of administrators at the specified institution. If a contact is not available, the Credential Evaluator will research the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) website and institution website for a higher education administrator’s contact information.
  - a) A verification template letter is prepared and emailed to the higher education institution, along with complete scans of the documents in question.

- b) The file is put on-hold while the Credential Evaluator waits for a response from the institution (files are reviewed quarterly if a response is not received to see if additional contact information is currently available or another method of verification can be used).
- c) A response from the higher education institution is received and documents are marked as authenticated or falsified for record in ECE archives.

5. The Credential Evaluator is then able to proceed with the evaluation report of the academic credentials for further education, employment, professional licensure, immigration, or other purpose. The evaluation report is valid for 5 years.

\*ECE also has a one-time use evaluation product called an ECE Scholar Profile. This evaluation is only for those who may have a difficult or impossible time trying to obtain their official documents. It is based on photocopies and scans, and the documents do not go through standard verification procedures. This evaluation leaves the verification up to the third party involved or serves as a general equivalence statement until the applicant can obtain their official documentation.

### 5.3. United Kingdom: Assessing Qualifications from Afghanistan at UK ENIC

*(by Mohammed Hatia, UK ENIC)*

UK ENIC assesses qualifications from around the world, for individual applicants and members who have a subscription with UK ENIC member services package.

#### Individuals

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For individual applicants, UK ENIC provides official statements on the comparability of qualifications via a statement of comparability certificate.

UK assesses qualifications of all levels (secondary, post-school, undergraduate, post-graduate) and type (academic, vocational, professional) as long as they are recognised in-country at a national level at the time they were studied.

For each award, UK ENIC ideally needs:

- ▶ The decorative final certificate (or alternative evidence that they completed the programme)
- ▶ The academic transcript detailing grades for all semesters of study
- ▶ For refugee applicants, a copy of their Biometric Residency Permit (BRP) or other evidence of their status as a refugee or asylum seeker. If resettled in the UK under the Afghanistan Relocation Assistance Policy (ARAP) or Afghanistan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), UK ENIC would also need to see evidence of this.

Based on the extensive research, UK ENIC provides comparability statements, as an official recognised statement certificate for individuals to use. This statement is very important for employers, for educational institutions, professional bodies, as well as for the Home Office.

## Member Services

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UK ENIC's members include professional bodies, employers, higher education institutions, colleges, governmental departments etc.

For members, UK ENIC provides assessments on qualifications based on the enquiry and documents presented. UK ENIC requires the final certificate and transcripts for assessment; and can subsequently provide the members with the information they need regarding the documents and education level.

UK ENIC members apply for guidance they need, so they can make their institutional decisions, based on the assessment UK ENIC provides.

## Refugee Services

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UK ENIC has a dedicated refugee support team who assist refugees with their qualifications, provided they can present evidence of their refugee status. UK ENICs provide Statements of Comparability for refugees, asylum seekers, and individuals resettled here under the Afghan resettlement schemes (ARAP and ACRS).

The refugee support team can investigate the individual's situation and the documents available, thereby enabling UK ENIC to provide additional supporting guidance for the refugee. The refugee support team conducts the interviews with the applicants where they feel this is necessary. They also provide statements in cases where documents are very limited; this is always on a case-by-case basis.

An example of this would be a situation where an individual has refugee status, uploads official documentation regarding refugee status, however the individual may have limited documents, which may be due to a number of reasons. Perhaps transcripts were unretrievable from their country. Perhaps, the individual wanted reassurance that UK ENIC does not contact the authorities in their country, as it would cause further issues for their family in their respective countries. Perhaps the individual left their country suddenly and were unable to take all their educational documents with them.

Due to the various sensitivities, UK ENIC uses their discretion where applicable, to support refugees with their educational achievements.

### **Missing documents**

The refugee / asylum seeker service is separate to the normal service as these applicants are often missing some, or all, of their qualification documents. As such, UK ENIC applies much more flexibility to their applications in terms of what documents they accept. Where significant documents are missing, there is a line added to the assessment just to confirm the documents which were presented e.g., "Assessment based on provisional certificate only".

If an applicant has no documents at all, UK ENIC can conduct a phone interview to help putting together contextual information that may still help them. In this case, there is a line added: "Assessment is based on a phone interview with a UK ENIC Information Advisor; no documents have been presented".

## Statistics

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Given August 2021 was the crucial month in terms of the withdrawal of support in Afghanistan, UK ENIC received an increase of 100% in individual applications in August 2021 regarding qualifications from Afghanistan, in comparison to July 2021, and an increase of 50% in September 2021 in comparison to July 2021.

In addition, UK ENIC received an increase of 53% in member enquiries regarding qualifications from Afghanistan in September 2021.

### **5.4. Norway: Practices and Experiences with the Evaluation of the Qualifications from Afghanistan at NOKUT**

*(by Marius Jensen, NOKUT)*

The number of applications has remained stable and consistent for the past couple of years. The applicants applying for recognition to NOKUT have generally been living in Norway for some years. The impact of situation of 2021 is expected to be noticed first in year 2022 and beyond. The immigration laws as well as the pandemic are likely to play a role in the number of cases expected to be received in the future. NOKUT did not encounter any noteworthy challenges beyond the usual challenges when it comes to the documentation.

Applications for recognition of education from Afghanistan are assessed through the interview-based assessment by NOKUT. There is a section within the Department of Foreign Education that oversees all interview-based assessments. There are two types of interview-based assessments conducted by NOKUT: Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation (UVD-procedure) and NOKUT's Qualifications Assessment.

#### **Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation (UVD-procedure)**

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Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation (UVD-procedure) includes five steps:

1. Upon receiving an application, NOKUT first does the initial assessment, to check the accreditation of the educational institution, level of the qualification and status of the documentation, including analysis of the format and the layout of the documents received.
2. As a next step, the applicant receives a questionnaire, which he/she is asked to complete to the best of his/her ability. The questionnaire includes questions about the applicant's education and the educational path. The questionnaire requires the applicant to, among others, identify and define 8 subjects (2 subjects from each of the educational years) with the subsequent course content. This step is first and foremost meant to assist the applicant to go "back in time" and try to refresh their memory of the education completed and to prepare the applicant for the next steps in the process. It is also helpful for the credential evaluators, as it provides explanation of the qualification in applicant's own words.

3. Once the questionnaire has been received, the applicant is invited to a preliminary interview with the two experienced credential evaluators. The purpose of the interview is to discuss the education completed by the applicant, discuss the questionnaire, and allow the applicants to provide additional information about their educational path and programme. It also allows the applicant to raise any questions that he/she may have.

4. Once the preliminary interview has been conducted, the applicant is invited to a second round of interviews with two professors who have expertise in the field of education of the applicant (interview with the committee of experts). As per this procedure, the applicant is given a minimum of one month of preparation for the interview. The second interview resembles an oral examination. The applicant is also given a home assignment a week prior to the interview. The applicant is required to complete the home assignment within three days and submit it prior to the interview. The home assignment is a prerequisite for being able to participate at the interview. In other words, there is a written, as well as an oral assessment. It is worth mentioning that one of the requirements for being able to participate at the interview with the experts committee is that the applicant has a proven language competency in Norwegian or English at minimum level of B1.

5. The experts committee submits a detailed report in accordance with a template made by NOKUT. NOKUT issues a legally binding decision based on the report written by the experts committee.

### **NOKUT's Qualifications Assessment**

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NOKUT's Qualifications Assessment is for those who apply for NOKUT's recognition, but who cannot be included in NOKUT's recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation (UVD-procedure). The reasons for this could be that they do not have sufficient language proficiency in English, Norwegian or another Scandinavian language, do not have residency in Norway or do not have a completed qualification within higher education.

NOKUT's Qualifications Assessment does not involve interview with the committee of experts and includes three steps:

1. The initial assessment, to check the accreditation of the educational institution, level of the qualification or incomplete education and status of the documentation, including analysis of the format and the layout of the documents received.
2. Mapping of the educational background with the help of a questionnaire, which includes questions about the applicant's education and the educational path. This questionnaire is similar to the questionnaire used in the UVD-procedure.
3. Interview with NOKUT's experienced credential evaluators.

NOKUT's Qualifications Assessment is issued to the successful candidates and includes information about the applicant's highest completed qualification, work experience and language proficiency, as well as advice and guidance about the road ahead. The document contains information on the documentation that formed the basis for

the individual assessment. NOKUT's Qualifications Assessment is valid for a limited time and has a validity of three years from the date of issue. NOKUT's Qualifications Assessment is not a legal binding document, but a standardised statement from NOKUT, which contains relevant information in connection with admission to further studies and job applications etc.

## **5.5. Germany: Current Status regarding Higher Education Qualifications from Afghanistan in the Central Office for Foreign Education ZAB (ENIC-NARIC Germany)**

*(by Miriam Wiederhold, ZAB)*

The Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB) is the central authority for the evaluation of foreign qualifications in Germany. These include school-leaving certificates, vocational qualifications and academic degrees. The ZAB provides services for educational institutions, public authorities and individuals.

One of the key ZAB products is the so called Zeugnisbewertung, the Statement of Comparability for Foreign Higher Education Qualifications, which is an official document that describes the foreign higher education qualification, its professional and academic usage. The Statement of Comparability can facilitate access to the German labour market for holders of foreign higher education qualifications.

Statements of Comparability are issued for higher education degrees obtained world-wide. The ZAB does not provide Statements for incomplete higher education courses or courses not assigned to the field of higher education. The ZAB can only issue a Statement of Comparability if the concerned higher education institution was recognised at the time of the applicant's graduation. To obtain a Statement of Comparability, applicants must submit their graduation certificate and a transcript detailing all courses attended and grades achieved. Both documents must be available in original language as a certified copy.

When it comes to applications submitted to ZAB by Afghan nationals seeking the receipt of a Statement of Comparability, we are reporting an increasing number of cases in which applicants do not have the possibility to send us the required documents as certified copies since postal services are currently not operating in Afghanistan. We have encountered requests from applicants asking whether they can send the documents in digital form instead.

At the moment it is not possible to foresee how the situation in Afghanistan will develop. In March 2022 it will become clearer whether the universities will reopen, in what form studies will be offered and whether women will be allowed to study.

ZAB continues to monitor the situation and shall report as soon as changes relevant for the issuance of Statements of Comparability occur.



## 5.6. Italy: CIMEA's Experiences with the Evaluations of Qualifications from Afghanistan

*(by Letizia Brambilla Pisoni, CIMEA)*

In 2021, CIMEA faced a significant increase of the numbers of applications with qualifications from Afghanistan, with 80% of them submitted from August to December 2021. The numbers continue to grow. Most of the files received by CIMEA in late 2021 – early 2022 are from the applicants with higher education qualifications with fragmented documentation, but a lot of professional experience. The situation with the documentation from holders of upper secondary qualifications is different. Little available information about this level of education and complete absence of documentations in many submitted files make the evaluation more challenging.

As of autumn 2021, in order to provide prompt support to a newly arrived group of applicants with qualifications from Afghanistan, the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) and CIMEA encouraged Italian higher education institutions to adopt flexible and prompt measures for the assessment of qualifications held by refugees and people in a refugee-like situation.

One of the measures adopted by the Italian higher education institutions is their active participation in the EQPR evaluation sessions, as in the cases of lacking documentations, the methodology adopted in the framework of the EQPR project has been proven as reliable and represents concrete support for both individuals and administrative procedures.

In CIMEA the focus has been set on keeping track of the available resources, systematizing the information and ensuring that those refugees who need an assessment are able to proceed with their request free of charge through the dedicated digital platform [CIMEA for Refugees - cimea.it](https://cimea.it).

## 6. About the Authors

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**Miriam Wiederhold** is a Head of Section in ZAB (ENIC-NARIC Germany), she has been representing Germany in the EQPR project since 2018.

**Tania Aslani** joined ZAB (ENIC-NARIC Germany) in 2019 and has been working with qualifications from Afghanistan since 2020.

**Letizia Brambilla Pisoni** has been a Senior Credential Evaluator at CIMEA since 2017, working in the academic recognition and education sector with a focus on Middle East and African countries. Her expertise is in the field of the recognition of refugees' qualifications with partial or missing documentation. She is a trained and highly experienced EQPR credential evaluator.



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Implemented by the Council of Europe since 2017, the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees enables refugees and asylum seekers to have their qualifications assessed even in the absence of full documentation. The EQPR helps refugees and asylum seekers to enter further studies or to seek employment. It eliminates unnecessary and repeated further assessments of the same qualifications in other European countries if and when the EQPR holder moves.

This guide contains the historical overview and analysis of the latest developments in the system of education in Afghanistan, information about the available resources and examples of good practice when assessing qualifications from Afghanistan.

## European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR)

[refugees.qualifications@coe.int](mailto:refugees.qualifications@coe.int)

[www.coe.int/eqpr](http://www.coe.int/eqpr)

PREMS 094722

ENG

[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)

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