



## Women's Solidarity for Education and Self-Determination in Afghanistan Workshop outcomes

Report by Michael Fanizadeh (VIDC) and Maryam Singh (Counseling Center for Migrants, Vienna)

The afternoon session was opened by City Councilor Alexandra Rezaei, AKIS Chairman Ghousuddin Mir, former Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Afghanistan Palwasha Kakar, migration researcher Judith Kohlenberger, Wali Shapour from the Association of Afghan Associations in the Netherlands, as well as Latif Estafli from AKIS and Friba Sadeq from Banu Magazine. The session was moderated by Maryam Singh from the Counseling Center for Migrants in Vienna and Friba Charkhi from AKIS.

The presentations focused clearly on the systematic disenfranchisement of women in Afghanistan and on the responsibility of the international community. In her speech, Judith Kohlenberger highlighted the particular risks and structural challenges faced by women and girls while fleeing. She noted that globally, more than half of refugees and asylum seekers were women and girls—with Afghan women being particularly affected due to the massive human rights violations in their country of origin. Women and girls are exposed to a significantly increased risk along the entire refugee route. These risks include, in particular, exploitation, human trafficking, and serious human rights violations—both during the flight and in host countries.

### Workshops

*Workshop 1: Strategies for Promoting the Education of Afghan Girls and Women (Farsi) Moderator: Najla Zamani (AKIS), with contributions from Rafi Ahmadi (ÖIF) and Saida Tolo (women's rights activist, Netherlands), among others.*

The workshop discussed how access to education for women and girls can be maintained and further developed under the current restrictive conditions in Afghanistan. The starting point was the recognition that the formal education system is no longer accessible to girls and that alternative approaches are becoming increasingly important. The focus was on digital learning opportunities, radio formats, and informal learning spaces as necessary supplements—and in some cases even as the only realistic option. While these cannot replace the formal education system, they serve as transitional solutions and protective mechanisms.

Particular emphasis was placed on supporting existing initiatives, such as private learning spaces and informal networks, which require targeted support and protection. The role of social structures was also discussed: sustainable educational work requires the involvement of men, for example through awareness-raising measures, media outreach, and culturally adapted approaches. Solidarity, empowerment, and networks among women were identified as key factors for disseminating knowledge and minimizing risks. The Afghan diaspora can make an important contribution through knowledge transfer, financial support, and digital educational offerings.

Key recommendations for action:

- Expansion of alternative educational formats (digital offerings, radio, informal learning spaces).
- Direct support for women and girls (online instruction, financial aid).
- Promotion of economic self-reliance (e.g., craft-based activities).
- Involvement of men (awareness-raising, educational programs).
- Strengthening networks and solidarity (networking, diaspora engagement).
- Promotion of media and access to information (independent media, radio, publications).

Key message: Most effective in the short term: Targeted support for digital and individualized educational opportunities, as they can be implemented quickly and provide direct access despite restrictions.

*Workshop 2: Education and Labor Market Integration of Afghan Women in the Diaspora (German).*

*Moderator: Maryam Singh (Counseling Center for Migrants), with contributions from, among others, Vera Glassner (Vienna Chamber of Labor), Elisabeth Kerndl (ÖGB Federal Women's Department), Kamini Sharma (AMS - SFU), Deniz Ülker (AMS – KON(SUB)), and Maria Rösslhummer (SToP Association)*

The workshop analyzed the structural and individual challenges Afghan women face in accessing education and the labor market in Austria and Europe. The focus was on both institutional support services—such as counseling and labor law information provided by the Vienna Chamber of Labor (including materials in Farsi)—and the lived realities of the participants.

Afghan women in Austria and Europe face significant barriers: a lack of childcare and inflexible working hours (e.g., night shifts) hinder their ability to work, traditional gender roles often require education within the family, and highly qualified women frequently struggle to have their degrees recognized. In addition, language barriers and multiple discrimination—such as in job application processes—complicate integration. At the same time, many women without formal education actively utilize existing services, and targeted support programs like *waff* are having an impact. Counseling centers serve as important points of contact for guidance and empowerment.

Violence prevention—such as through initiatives like *SToP*—requires the involvement of men and communities, as well as collective responsibility (“don’t look away, take action”). At the European level, lengthy asylum procedures delay integration, and the linkage between language support and labor market measures often remains insufficient.

Key recommendations for action:

- Expand childcare, improve work-life balance.
- Accelerate recognition procedures.
- Create low-threshold educational and language programs.
- Strengthen counseling structures and combat discrimination.
- Ensure early integration into educational and labor market programs.
- Promote violence prevention and awareness.

Key message: Sustainable integration can only be achieved through holistic approaches that break down structural barriers, take social conditions into account, and specifically promote women's potential.