



## Strengthening Representation – Enabling Participation: The Role of Media and Civil Society in the Context of Afghan Refugees Policy Brief

Berlin Forum for Afghanistan - May 2025

For over four decades, the Afghan diaspora has been part of German society. Yet their voices remain largely unheard in media, politics, and public discourse. The 5th exchange of the *Berlin Forum for Afghanistan*, held on May 15, 2025, brought together representatives of the Afghan civil society, journalists, academics, and political actors to discuss media representation, structural barriers, and ways to enhance participation.

This policy brief summarizes key insights and recommendations from the forum. The focus lies on the question of how to create a public sphere that is sensitive to discrimination – through stronger inclusion of Afghan communities, fair media coverage, and sustainable support for civic engagement.

## Overcoming Invisibility – Dismantling Structural Exclusion

Although over 400,000 Afghans live in Germany, their perspectives remain underrepresented in the media and politics. Contrary to journalistic standards, media reports disproportionately emphasize the nationality of non-German suspects in crime coverage and the nationality of Afghan refugees is often instrumentalized in political discourse, a dynamic that contributes to their increased vulnerability. At the same time, the positive contributions of people with Afghan migration backgrounds are often left untold.

Access to employment and participation in society is hindered by slow recognition of qualifications, rigid structures, and a lack of political representation. Civil society engagement does exist, for example in associations and local initiatives, but it rarely receives institutional support. Migrant self-organizations (MSOs) face bureaucratic hurdles, limited resources, and a lack of visibility.





## Recommendations for Policy, Media, and Civil Society

should be supported and included.

- Strengthen Representation in the Media
   Journalistic standards must be applied consistently. Mentioning a person's origin must not lead to stigmatization. Media outlets should actively include migrant voices not only during crises, but also in everyday reporting.

   Newsrooms need greater diversity: journalists with migration backgrounds
- 2. Support Refugee-Led Organizations
  MSOs play a crucial role in integration work. They require long-term funding,
  low-threshold support programs, and access to political decision-making
  bodies. Existing initiatives like VAFO should be strengthened nationwide to
  serve as bridges between the diaspora, politics, and society.
- 3. Improve Access to Education, Employment, and Mental Health Services Recognition procedures for academic and professional qualifications must be accelerated, and language courses made more accessible. Afghan professionals, particularly in social and healthcare sectors, should be systematically integrated through qualification and bridging programs.
- 4. Enable Political Participation
  People from Afghanistan must be included in integration councils, advisory
  boards, and political decision-making even without German citizenship.
  Their practical expertise is a valuable asset to local and national integration
  policy.
- 5. **Promote Media Literacy and Empowerment**Members of the diaspora should receive training in media work, public communication, and advocacy. Success stories, awareness campaigns, and local media projects can help break down stereotypes and present a more nuanced image.

## From the Margins to the Center of Society

The event clearly demonstrated: the Afghan diaspora contributes valuable expertise, networks, and commitment. But structural obstacles, distorted media narratives, and the lack of political voice stand in the way of full participation. Concrete action is needed – at the municipal, state, and federal levels. As a first step, it is imperative that policymakers, the media, and civil society collaborate to ensure that Afghan refugees are treated with dignity and respect, and that their identity is not exploited for political purposes.





International and national organizations, public authorities, and media institutions have a responsibility to create spaces where representation is not merely symbolic but structurally anchored. An inclusive democracy thrives on diverse perspectives. The Afghan diaspora is ready to contribute – it must be heard, supported, and included.

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