

IMPACT STORY



SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF MIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN FROM AFGHANISTAN IN CHILE

Photography: UN Women/Pablo Sanhueza

“I am the Afghan girl the Taliban wanted to chain. I am the girl they wanted to imprison, who cannot study or work in that society. So, my crime and that of other Afghan women is to fight for our freedom,” said Zahra Karimi during the launch of the UN Women’s social integration and economic empowerment initiative. 22-year-old Zahra fled Afghanistan after the Taliban took power in 2021 and now lives in Santiago de Chile as a refugee.

Together with 25 women, she participates in the UN Women’s Second Chance Education programme in Chile. This initiative provides comprehensive support for migrant and refugee women. As part of the initiative, participants receive tools to help them integrate into the country’s economy and society.

A characterization survey was carried out to identify Afghan women’s needs. As a result, it was possible to develop support components and services based on the different profiles of Afghan women living in Chile. Accordingly:

45% have completed university studies
34% have not finished school

Economically speaking

52% report being unemployed
27% have never worked

Language is one of the main barriers to integration into the formal market.

They also state as priorities

76% finding a job
55% getting support during the immigration process

The first component is an introductory Spanish course implemented by ECLAC to facilitate social and cultural integration into the host country. Zahra says, *“The language lessons were enriching for me; with these lessons, I learned Spanish better. They helped me find my way in Chilean society and get in touch with it”*. In addition, each participant was given a tablet, so they had an internet connection through a device.

Additionally, due to a collaboration with the private sector, their digital skills have been strengthened through face-to-face training to improve their integration using technology tools.

In parallel and in partnership with UNHCR, legal counseling sessions were held, supported by university legal clinics. Through this component, participants learned about Chile’s social protection network and got more information about their immigration status. Like other women, Zahra arrived in Chile without knowing where she was going. In this sense, the sessions are crucial to educating them about their rights and the environment in which they develop.

Providing women with free counseling and personalized assistance that strengthens labor insertion is essential to economic empowerment. The intervention includes support for developing CVs, job search strategies, and interview preparation. Parallel to this, awareness-raising is conducted in the workplace to highlight the benefits of hiring refugee women. On the other hand, participants interested in entrepreneurship have been referred to other initiatives to learn how to strengthen their businesses thanks to the Second Chance Education Program’s network with civil society. An example is Fundación Gastronomía Social. This organization offers cooking and

Photo above: Zahra Karimi at ECLAC during the launch of the Initiative for the Social and Economic Integration of Migrant and Refugee Women from Afghanistan.

entrepreneurship courses to vulnerable people free of charge. Having taken one of these courses, Zahra continues to develop her Afghan food venture, “Sabores de Kabul,” which she runs in Santiago through Instagram. She dreams of opening a restaurant where “*only women work, a place where they can meet, laugh, share with their sons and daughters, and feel sure nothing will happen to them.*”

In each activity, spaces are provided to establish refugee women’s networks. In addition, they are invited to participate in the Second Chance Education network through the web application, allowing them to connect with other women in the programme in Chile. Zahra appreciates the importance of networking. She notes, “*from my asylum experience in this country, I want to share some issues with others who are also refugees so that we can find solutions together to our problems.*”



Photography: UN Women UNHCR/Felipe Concha

PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

Agencies of the United Nations system

The initiative of social integration and economic empowerment is articulated by the Tu Oportunidad – Second Chance Education Programme. It is developed within a framework of multi-sector collaboration, where the basis has been inter-agency cooperation with UNHCR and ECLAC. The above is thanks to the contribution of Silicon Soccer Inc.

Public Sector

The work with the Ministry of the Interior stands out through the “Intersectoral Roundtable for refugees and asylum seekers,” where UN Women contributes to public policies and humanitarian response services for the inclusion of migrants and refugees in Chile with a gender perspective. On the other hand, Fundación de las Familias, which depends on the Ministry of Social Development, has facilitated its dependencies for the development of digital skills courses.

Civil Society

Afghan-Chilean Institute of Culture Foundation and Ascend Athletics Foundation have been fundamental partners from civil society in facilitating the contact with Afghan refugee women in the country. Moreover, Fundación Emplea, as an implementing partner of the Second Chance Education programme, has been crucial in facilitating the labor insertion of women in Chile.

Private Sector



Microsoft, in collaboration with its implementing agent Innovacien, has helped strengthen the participants’ job placement skills through the digital literacy course offered in person.

SECOND CHANCE EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMME

UN Women’s [Second Chance Education Programme](#) provides a comprehensive solution for women who have not completed their formal education and are in a vulnerable situation in terms of employment and job opportunities. UN Women and the BHP Foundation implement this initiative in six countries simultaneously: Cameroon, Jordan, India, Mexico, Australia, and Chile. Through public and private cooperation, it develops a sustainable system for women’s empowerment at the local, national, and global levels, which promotes formal education, employment, and the development of enterprises.

To date, the social integration and economic empowerment initiative has worked with 26 Afghan refugee women. Because of the positive impact it has had on the lives of the participants and the interest of civil society and government collaborators, the work will be amplified to extend the intervention methodology with refugees of other nationalities.

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