



Children and families from Afghanistan and music – what do we need to know?

No. 1 TOP TIP → Speak with families first before making music with children and designing programmes.

GENERAL POINTS around Cultural Awareness

- **Not all families from Afghanistan hold the same views on making and listening to music.** Some families will be very happy to take part in the full range of music-making activities offered by Music Hubs, while some families will find ***all*** music-making activities to be against their beliefs. Most will fall between these two poles and will be interested in taking part in only some music activities.¹ (See recent poll results below.)
- **Age and gender** play an intersecting role. For some families, it will be more acceptable for younger children to participate in music-making activities such as singing in a co-educational environment. Older young people (over the age of 12, for example) may be discouraged or not permitted to take part in co-educational music-making activities. Co-education is very rare in Afghanistan and even rarer with regard to musical education.
 - Some young women and their families may not feel comfortable with them participating in public performances. Young and adult female performers and musicians in Afghanistan were rare even before the new restrictions on music by the current regime.
 - (N.B., LGBTQ+ individuals experienced—and continue to experience—persecution and marginalisation in Afghanistan.)
- **In some cases, families and students may find it acceptable to take part in an event that involves music, so long as the child is not performing music themselves.** Writing and speaking poetry, for example, is not generally considered a musical activity when spoken rather than sung.

¹ Afghanistan is culturally predominantly Islamic, and resources on music and Islam will provide more insight to these cultural sensitivities.

Additional notes for SCHOOLS providing music for children from Afghanistan

- It is recommended that schools and teachers speak to the child and their parents/guardians before involving the child in general music classes. This is even more important in co-educational settings.
- Trauma awareness training for music teachers working with refugees is strongly advised.

Additional notes for peripatetic TUTORS & MUSIC LEADERS

- Some families open to musical education (as well as the child) may still have a strong preference for same-sex tutors. For example, a female tutor for their female child.
- Trauma awareness training for music teachers working with refugees is strongly advised. (See below for training available.)

Additional notes for specific GROUPS of refugee children

- Liaise with local refugee agencies and, wherever possible, consult directly with the participants' families during the *initial stages* of programme design.
- Liaise with relevant local agencies to identify needed training for staff and partner to ensure adequate *welfare support for staff* as well as participants. Trauma awareness training for teachers and staff working with refugees is essential.
- It is crucial not to underestimate the vulnerability of potential participants, and to be cognizant of music's capacity for evoking emotions and memories.

No. 2 TOP TIP → Go slowly, get professional advice and family input before embarking on new programmes to engage refugee children .

The biggest issue is that it takes time to develop relationships, trust and communication in order to engage in meaningful music-making activities, so a one-off “parachute in” approach is not likely to be very effective or rewarding for either the people delivering or those on the receiving end. Although a taster project delivered in collaboration with a refugee agency which is part of a more enduring support network/programme could work well.

Specialist training for musicians and music educators

Play for Progress offers professional development training for musicians and music educators who are interested in working with refugee children. You can contact Alyson Frazier at a.frazier@playforprogress.com to learn more.

At the time of writing Music Mark are working with [Musicians Without Borders](#) to offer training – check Music Mark [website events page](#) for details

Poll results

A poll of 60 newly arrived families from Afghanistan living at a hotel in London in November 2021 found that the follow percentages of respondents **agreed** with the following statements”:²

% of respondents	Statement
75%	I want to participate in music activities.
50%	I want to learn how to play one of the musical instruments.
47%	I want my children to learn one or more musical instruments.
50%	I would like my children to learn to sing as well.
50%	I have no problem with coeducation of girls and boys in the same class.
50%	I prefer that the activities or classes of girls and boys should be in separate groups.
25%	I do not like my children to learn music.
25%	I do not like my children to learn singing.

A selection of additional comments from respondents which music educators might find helpful:

“In my opinion, in addition to the school subjects, music should also be taught to our children to improve children's skills and learn what they are interested in. Learning music is a necessity to put into practice what they have in their imaginations, to use their talents in the future, and alongside good doctors and engineers, they can be good music players and singers as well.”

“I hope that they could provide music education for adults so that I can learn one of the musical instruments.”

“If a teacher can teach me at home or online, I do like to learn a musical instrument.”

“I do like to listen to Afghani Music, is it possible for me to learn how to play an Afghani musical instrument, like Rubab?”

Contact information for panellists

Cayenna Ponchione-Bailey - c.ponchione-bailey@sheffield.ac.uk

Lauren Braithwaite - lauren.braithwaite@linacre.ox.ac.uk

Mirwaiss Sidiqi - sidiqimirwaiss@yahoo.com

Alison Frazier - a.frazier@playforprogress.com

James Pinchen - james.pinchen@surreycc.gov.uk

Compiled by Dr Cayenna Ponchione-Bailey (St Catherine’s College, University of Oxford and Leverhulme Research Fellow in Music, University of Sheffield) following a session for music education hubs hosted by Wiltshire Music Connect Autumn 2021.

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² Many thanks to Bashir Paiman, newly arrived from Afghanistan, for designing, collecting and collating this poll and results.

Useful links

Who	What (brief description)	Web link
Schools of Sanctuary	Schools of Sanctuary is a growing network of more than 300 primary and secondary schools all committed to supporting the thousands of young people seeking sanctuary in the UK, creating a culture of welcome and inclusion whilst raising awareness of the issues faced by refugees and asylum seekers.	https://schools.cityofsanctuary.org/
Lullaby Project and RPO Resound	The Lullaby Project gives mums and dads in challenging circumstances the opportunity to create bespoke lullabies alongside professional musicians, allowing them to explore their thoughts and feelings about their children, enhancing the bond between them by creating something that can be treasured forever.	The Lullaby Project – The Irene Taylor Trust https://www.rpo.co.uk/rpo-resound/in-action/the-lullaby-project
Play for Progress	a.macdonald@playforprogress.com and a.frazier@playforprogress.com	https://www.playforprogress.org/
Afghan Songbook	The Afghan Children’s Songbook Project strives to revitalize the children’s music of Afghanistan which was almost completely eradicated by the war and oppression that has afflicted Afghanistan for over 30 years.	http://afghansongbook.org/music/
Music activities with displaced communities in Surrey contact	Jim Pinchen: james.pinchen@surreycc.gov.uk	



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