

## Learn more about Afghan Allies in the United States

*We invite you to explore more about Afghan newcomers in the U.S. and ways in which we, as a Christian community, can support them. This compilation is in no way exhaustive and merely seeks to provide some input for those who are interested in learning more. It contains some ideas and resources presented by Andrew Sechrist at VPC on January 23, 2022.*

*If you would like to recommend other resources that we can share with the congregation, please contact Sharon Edelman ([sharon\\_edelmann@yahoo.com](mailto:sharon_edelmann@yahoo.com)) and/or Karen Mokate ([kmmokate@gmail.com](mailto:kmmokate@gmail.com)).*

### **What is the church's role in welcoming and supporting refugees and displaced persons?**

Jesus himself was a refugee or asylum seeker, *Matthew 2:13-23*

Immigrants and refugees are made in the image of God (*Genesis 1:26-27*) and possess inherent dignity and potential.

God call us to care for the vulnerable (*Deut 10:17-19; Psalms 146:9; Zech 7:9-10; Jer 22:3, Mal 3:5*)

World Relief provides a six-lesson study, [Discovering and Living God's Heart for Immigrants: A Guide to Welcoming the Stranger](#). The website provides access to a pdf guide and a group of videos.

- Good for any small group of people (a small group, a family, a high school group, etc.)
- General -- Not specific to Afghanistan
- Six sections: Watch 5 min intro video ; Read article as a group ; Discuss ; Pray

### **Who are the Afghan allies that are currently in need? What challenges do they face?**

In August 2021, the United Nations estimated that up to half a million Afghans could flee the country by the end of the year; most of those would flee to neighboring Iran and Pakistan. On December 31, 2021, PBS reported that between August and December, the United States evacuated more than 75,000 Afghans through Operation Allies Welcome. At that time, roughly 23,000 evacuees remained on six military bases across the U.S., but more than 50,000 had been placed in local communities. After a tumultuous journey, these refugees are now tasked with rebuilding lives in a new country.

Dec 31, 2021:

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/many-afghan-refugees-including-unaccompanied-minors-remain-in-legal-limbo-in-the-u-s-2>

### **What is the legal status of Afghan newcomers in the U.S?**

Many Afghans who were employed by or worked on behalf of the US government were granted a special immigrant visa, or SIV, which is meant to provide a pathway to permanent residency in this country. However, in the face of the rapid evacuation in office, many Afghans were admitted to the United States as humanitarian

parolees. This status is temporary (up to two years). Parolees must be granted another status (asylum or Special Immigrant Visa holder) in order to stay in the US for a longer period of time. You can learn more about legal status:

- <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/special-immg-visa-afghans-employed-us-g ov.html>
- [https://www.state.gov/u-s-refugee-admissions-program-prioritydesignation-for-afghan-nationals /](https://www.state.gov/u-s-refugee-admissions-program-prioritydesignation-for-afghan-nationals/)

## **How are Afghan newcomers being welcomed into communities in the United States?**

The United States government works through nine refugee resettlement agencies:

[Church World Service \(CWS\)](#)

[Ethiopian Community Development Council \(ECDC\)](#)

[Episcopal Migration Ministries \(EMM\)](#)

[Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society \(HIAS\)](#)

[International Rescue Committee \(IRC\)](#)

[US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants \(USCRI\)](#)

[Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services \(LIRS\)](#)

[United States Conference of Catholic Bishops \(USCCB\)](#)

[World Relief Corporation \(WR\)](#)

Note that six of these are faith-based organizations.

Each of these agencies, in turn, work with community partners, including church congregations, in order to welcome and support refugee families. Each partner is responsible for supporting the family during at least a three-month period, and generally supports that family during a longer period of time.

## **What financial support and services is the government offering to Afghan refugees?**

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services) works through the resettlement agencies cited above to provide services and financial support:

- <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/refugees/afghan-assistance-resources>
- <https://refugees.org/resources-for-afghan-allies/>

## **What needs of the Afghan newcomers will our church be supporting?**

In general, community sponsors are responsible for supporting the initial introduction into a local community and empowering the family to become self-sufficient. The responsibilities include:

- Securing housing for the first months in the community
- Providing basic necessities, such as furniture and furnishings

- Providing three months of income support
- Connecting to legal assistance
- Support in obtaining social security card, formalizing change of address, and accessing medical service and other available benefits
- Enrolling children school
- Providing English language support and job search advice and support
- Providing community orientation: grocery stores, other shopping, libraries, transportation

Church World Services (cwsglobal.org) has great online information about [community sponsorship](#).

### **What are basic facts about Afghanistan and Afghan culture that we should know/understand?**

Afghanistan is a landlocked country located at the crossroads of Central and South Asia. It is not a Middle Eastern country. The UN estimates that the population of Afghanistan is 38 million and the average annual GDP per capita is \$2000 (2020 estimate). People from Afghanistan are called “Afghans”; the national currency is the Afghani.

The country is richly diverse; its people are predominantly Sunni Muslim and hail from different ethnicities, including Pashtun (estimated to be 42% of the population), Tajik (27%), Hazara (9%), Uzbek (8%), Aimaq (4%), Turkmen (3%), Balochi (2%) and others. The main languages of Afghanistan are Pashto and Dari (which is derived from Persian).

The first family that VPC is supporting is of the Hazara people, who reside mainly in the mountainous Hazarajat region in central Afghanistan, as well as in the large cities of the country. Hazaras are said to be descendants of Genghis Khan, the founder of the Mongol Empire. They speak Dari, including a dialect known as Hazaragi. Many Hazaras belong to the Shia sect of Islam in a country that is mostly Sunni Muslim. As a result, they are often viewed as outsiders.

You can read more about Afghan culture at:

<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/important-aspects-of-the-culture-of-afghanistan.html>

<https://historyplex.com/afghanistan-culture-traditions-customs>

[https://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student.php?id=1](https://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student.php?id=1) <https://coresourceexchange.org/working-with-afghans/>

Switchboard TA: Video: Background & Socio-cultural Strengths and Needs of Afghan Evacuees

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfkjBR7q58c&t=42s>

## **What guidelines or suggestions can we follow to interact effectively with refugee families?**

[“Want to Help Afghan Refugees? Read These First”](#) Three articles and a 30-min podcast. Not Afghan-specific.

[List of Do’s and Don’ts for helping Afghan refugees](#) - Faith & Leadership (Duke Divinity)

[Supporting Afghan Students in Schools & Youth Programs in the United States](#)

## **What can we learn from the experience of other churches and other organizations that have supported refugees?**

World Relief: <https://worldrelief.org/help-afghan-allies/>

Interfaith Immigration Coalition: [http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Refugees-Welcome-Toolkit\\_5.12.16.pdf](http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Refugees-Welcome-Toolkit_5.12.16.pdf)

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services: <https://www.lirs.org/help-our-afghan-allies/>  
[https://www.lirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/LIRS\\_GATHER\\_Afghanistan\\_2020\\_Community\\_Toolkit\\_vF.pdf](https://www.lirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/LIRS_GATHER_Afghanistan_2020_Community_Toolkit_vF.pdf)

## **In general, how can we show active love towards refugees and immigrants?**

- Serve locally
- Fund organizations doing good work at scale
- Advocate
- Continue to learn, educate and engage. This is a marathon, not a sprint!
- Remember that this is God’s work!