



## INTRODUCTION

Everyday, Afghan refugees are coming to our communities having fled their homes. Many have encountered multiple stressors and trauma just trying to get out of the country, fleeing from place to place, and experiencing the terrors of trying to get to the airport or across borders. Many have had to leave their families, possessions, friends, community, jobs, their lives, their hopes and dreams; everything disappearing in an instant. They are going through grief and loss. Many are struggling with fear, not knowing if their family will be safe back in Afghanistan, perhaps feeling guilt for having left. They may still be feeling hyper vigilant, their bodies feeling as if they are continually on the run and not able to calm down the feelings of anxiety and stress. They may be experiencing physical pain and symptoms and difficulty with sleep even though in the present moment they are safe, they may not feel safe. For some, they are finally starting to feel a sense of calm as the reality sinks in that they are away from the dangers of their home country. Many wonder, where will they be finally settled and will they be able to get through this very foreign land and culture, learn language, and make ends meet? Will their children be okay in this new land? I can't imagine all that they have gone through to get to this new land. And they have so much more to go through as they are in transition and still worry about their family back home. Yet they possess a lot of strength and resilience to get through what they have gone through. And they bring with them intelligence, hospitality, warmth, and other qualities and values that may be dampened down at the moment because of what they have gone through but can shine if given the opportunity.

As a foreigner or *horaji* in Dari, I remember moving to Afghanistan to serve the people and everything was new, scary, uncertain, yet exciting. I fumbled through not knowing the culture and the language. "Was this okay, was that not okay, should I do this, or not do that, I feel so lost trying to figure things out here with a totally different system of doing things, will they understand my feeble attempts to communicate like a baby learning her first words, am I being sensitive to the people and their culture?" These are probably similar things the Afghans are thinking of. The thing that made a difference in my adjustment was the group of Afghan friends who welcomed me, helped me, guided me, were patient with me and gave me grace, and protected me (there were still many guns at that time with much insecurity). One time in a middle of a shootout with everyone running, my staff kept me safe. Another time when driving on a desert road stuck in a middle of a sandstorm, a truck driver who was stuck on the road

offered his bottle of water which might have been his only source of water. There are so many instances of kindness from people I knew as well as from strangers. Without their help, I know that my international co-workers and I would not have been able to get through the time of adjustment and living life in that new land as well as we did.

They didn't have much, but their hospitality was amazing and they always gave their best. I remember going to one village and as we were preparing to share the huge delicious plate of *Kabuli Pilau* that took hours to cook with loving hands, my host searched high and low and came back with a spoon just as I was ready to dig in with my right hand (after being passed a vase of water to wash my hands) as that was the culture. I was trying to be in their culture and they were trying to accommodate my culture. It was touching! They were my brothers, sisters, friends, extended family. Their words of *Khush AmadEn* (Welcome in Dari language) reverberated in my heart as they welcomed me into their homes, villages, schools. In the same way, your willingness to help the Afghan people and minister God's love and care to them will be a source of support and comfort as you welcome them. I have written this guide in hopes of giving you some resources and tools to help support our Afghan friends as they transition to their new home.

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## STATUS

Not everyone who comes to the U.S. or other country will be considered a refugee or a visa holder. This is important to understand as the different categories can be confusing to some and will add to the stresses in resettlement for Afghans due to limited benefits they may receive. The following categories are applicable to the U.S. and each country will have their own regulations.

According to the UNHCR: "Refugees are people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country. They often have had to flee with little more than the clothes on their back, leaving behind homes, possessions, jobs and loved ones. Refugees are defined and protected in international law." The [1951 Refugee Convention](#) is a key legal document and defines a refugee as: "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion."

Although some will meet that definition and will be provided refugee benefits (financial, linkage to a resettlement agency, medical, ability to work, and pathway to legal status), not everyone will. Those coming as SIV visa holders (1. those who were employed by or on behalf of the U.S. government or 2. by ISAF or a successor mission in the capacity as an interpreter/translator for U.S. military) will have the same resettlement benefits as refugees.

Those who don't have a visa in place or were not referred as refugees by UNHCR, may come in with humanitarian aid parole status to the U.S. (after filing an application and having a sponsor) and will have some very limited initial assistance but no medical and long term benefits. The duration for parole status is for 2 years and they will have to apply for a separate work authorization which can take some time. They do not have the pathway to legal status and after 2 years may try to renew without a guarantee of approval or may be have to leave the country. I am hoping that policy will change and provision will be made for these people.

For those who have traveled to the U.S. on their own, they may file for asylum based on certain criteria but will have no benefits and will need legal assistance which can take a long time and a will require lot of funds. It has been wonderful for the U.S. and other countries to provide pathways for Afghans to enter on a humanitarian basis; however, given these different categories of legal status, many may be "in limbo" knowing they don't have permanent status even they though they have arrived to the U.S. or other country.

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## CULTURE

As we head into this section on culture, please note that this is just a general snapshot and may or may not accurately reflect the culture and values of each Afghan. Each will have their own cultural backgrounds and values that may be reflected as individuals, as part of a family, as part of a community, etc. The best thing is to observe and take a stance of a learner. We want to be respectful and can utilize culture as a bridge to build relationship and trust, but we are not expected to conform to other people's culture.

### **People and Language**

Afghanistan is a land of many tribes and languages. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Nuristani, Baluch, Turkmen, and others. Given that there are multiple ethnic groups, it may be hard for people to work together or trust each other as many villages have been separated by their tribal groups. Even in the U.S., I have heard of Afghan refugees congregating in the same city with those they are most affiliated with which I think is very natural. Despite all this, many have learned to work together regardless of their affiliation/tribe/gender in work settings, school and in communities.

The major languages in Afghanistan are Dari and Pashto, with languages spoken by other ethnicities such as Uzbek, etc. The Afghan people are bright but not everyone has had a chance at education and have learned to read and write Dari/Pashto. Afghanistan has been through numerous wars, girls have not been allowed to go to school, and there have been other

circumstances which have limited educational opportunities for people. The 20 years of international assistance has provided opportunities at education with the building of schools and various educational programs and resources and people have been eager to take advantage of those opportunities to carve a better future for themselves.

## **Religion/Holidays**

According to Albany.edu “The People of Afghanistan”, 99% are Muslims with a very small percentage of other religions such as Hindu, Sikhs, Yahudis (Jewish), and Christians. Amongst the Muslims, 3/4 are Sunni and 1/3 Shia with some mix of folk Islamic practices. Muslims follow Islam and believe in Allah and practice the 5 pillars: profession of faith (shahada), prayer (5 times a day), almsgiving, fasting, pilgrimage (the Haaj). The Quran is their holy book and they will treat it with reverence (keeping in on a high shelf, etc.).

Some of the important holidays are Eid-e-Ramadan (after the conclusion of Ramadan), Eid-e-Qurban (Sacrifice of Abraham’s son), NaorOz (First day of spring), the birth/death of their prophet Muhammad.

## **Greetings**

Greetings are very important in Afghanistan. You may see the same person multiple times and still greet each other. In the U.S. greetings and leave takings are brief. For Afghans, they will ask “how are you, how is your family, how is your health” aside from the brief “hello” or “hi”. Women greet women with kiss 3x on alternating cheeks starting from the left cheek or they may shake hands if in a more formal context like work. Women generally do not shake hands with men. Men should not touch or shake a woman’s hand unless they initiate a hand shake. If a man wants to greet a woman, he should put his right hand on his heart and nod briefly. For men, they will put their right hand on their heart and then shake hands. The left hand is considered unclean so always offer the right hand instead. Close friends and relatives will hug each other. When men greet each other, a man should not ask about how the wife is doing. It is better to say “How is your family.” In the same way as greetings are important, leave taking is valuable as well.

## **Gender**

There is a separation of men and women in the culture. Although some of that has changed with men and women going to school and working together, Afghan culture is very traditional and conservative. For women, modesty is important and that will be seen reflected in the conservative dress with arms/legs/chest covered. In public, the women wear head coverings/long coats/burkas but when together just with the women or with family in the home, they are more free to be themselves. For special occasions, women will gather together and wear beautiful

clothes and not feel the need to have their heads covered (although the older ladies still tend to wear scarves). I remember being invited to a wedding and a young girl told me in a cute way I should wear more makeup to the wedding to celebrate. Among women, you will also see more closeness in physical space and proximity, leaning next to each other when sitting. When women interact with men, it is usually to address business matters and is to the point. Women do not laugh and smile in front of men who are not their family as it can present a negative image of the woman.

Men should generally not approach a woman but if needed for business purposes, keep it short and to the business at hand and avoid physical contact unless a woman initiates a hand shake. Keep eye contact at a minimum. If the husband is available, it is better to speak with the husband. Men can approach children. It may seem like in the western mind, to be discrimination towards women but since modesty and respect are highly valued in the culture, it is a way of men being able to protect the women in their family. As I wore a scarf when I lived in Afghanistan to be respectful of the culture, there are times when I felt more vulnerable in public without a scarf and the scarf felt like it was a form of protection. Not everyone feels that way but for me, that was my experience. The best thing would be to observe and see how people relate to each other to understand the dynamics. When we respect their culture, it is a form of building trust and developing relationship with them which says “I respect and value you.”. Given that they are entering our culture, there will need to be a re-envisioning of what that will look like as they learn to adjust and integrate their culture with their new country culture and values but that will take time.

## **Hospitality**

Hospitality is a high value in Afghan culture. If we were in their land, they would be hospitable hosts, serving the very best, continually filling up the glass with tea, entertaining you, talking with you, trying to make you comfortable by giving you fluffy pillows to lean your back on as you sit on the long cushions on the floor, and seating you away from the door as the honored guest. Any time I wasn't talking (due to language/being an introvert), they were asking me if I was bored. They felt the need to make sure I was okay as their guest. Sometimes the host provides a lot more than just food and hospitality. A colleague was invited to be a guest at a village and when some people came with weapons, the host courageously informed the people that this person was their guest and was able to convince them to leave. In this case, the host was also a protector. Such a parallel to some of the stories we read in the Bible.

I was invited to an Afghan refugee family in the U.S. who had settled for several years. and that warm hospitality was so evident in their new land and I came home stuffed with the most delicious Afghan dishes. For the refugees who have just arrived and maybe in transition and not settled into their homes, not having a place to host guests is probably difficult. When you visit, taking off your shoes before entering the home, and accepting their hospitality of tea or whatever they are able to offer you is very honoring for them. And if you invite them over to your home,

displaying hospitality is very important as well. In the U.S., we offer something and the guest says “no, it’s okay” to be polite, they will be sad if we don’t end up offering anything. Afghan culture says to keep asking and offering and we should be polite to take something that they offer us. When done with tea, you can put your hand over the cup and when done with food, leave some on the plate otherwise they will fill it again. And if you are offered a plate of food to share with others, keep to your side of the dish-although you may see them pushing the meat towards you as that is considered the best part as meat is expensive. Although you may accept the food, in case of allergies or certain health conditions you can politely let them know you have allergies or due to health am not able to partake. There are hot/cold categories of foods and which foods you should not eat when having certain health conditions. I definitely missed out on a lot of good Central Asian melons because of my allergy!

I hope you will get a chance to see the warmth and care and hospitable nature of the Afghan people as you meet with them and develop relationships with them! If you invite them over to your home, do not offer any alcohol or pork as it is considered taboo in their culture. Their meat is also prepared halal so they may not feel comfortable to eat the food. Taking into these consideration will be important in hosting guests and making them feel welcome.

When invited to an Afghan’s home or when you meet with them, be careful of complementing or admiring something they own otherwise they may give it to you to take home. Instead of saying “Oh I love that”, you can say “that looks good on you” or “you have very good ideas on decorating.” As it is culture of reciprocity, if they give you something it is polite to give them something in return. Whenever I brought over baked goods or food to them, they never returned the container empty but filled it with something else. I learned to do the same.

## **Shame/Honor/Communication**

The culture is a shame/honor based culture whereas Western cultures can be guilt based such as “I feel guilty so I should not do this.”

From Dictionary.com:

Shame is “the painful feeling arising from the consciousness of something dishonorable, improper, ridiculous, etc., done by oneself or another.”

Guilt is “the fact or state of having committed an offense, crime, violation, or wrong, especially against moral or penal law; culpability: a feeling of responsibility or remorse for some offense, crime, wrong, etc., whether real or imagined.”

Knowing this will help in our understanding and communication with Afghans. For example, if there is a conflict or something that needs to be said, it is important not to say anything negative to the person in front of others as they can “lose face”. And we should be careful how we speak with them one-on-one because if they feel “shamed”, they may shut down and not want to share

anything. At the same time, if the person has done something dishonorable, the community can be utilized to bring shame and help the person not to do the offensive act. This came in handy when someone was inappropriate to women in public. Communication tends to be more indirect, rather than to the point. The words you use, the tone of voice matters. They may tend to be more guarded, reserved and not share the deep things until they get to know you. They have had years of war and have learned ways to survive and have learned to be tough on the outside. Yet they are some of the warmest individuals I have known. For Afghans, it is important to take time to build relationships and may God give you wisdom as you are a bridge of peace.

DO:	DON'T:
Be a learner of their culture and respectful. If you're not sure, ask rather than assuming.	Try to do everything in their culture at the risk of your values as they will not expect you to and wonder why you are doing it especially in the US.
For women, be modest in clothing	Wear a head scarf or covering as it will appear strange.
Be aware of men-women interactions in their culture and be sensitive to how they interact	Expect them to conform to Western ways of interacting
Build relationships and trust	Get straight to "business" or impose your ideas. Don't put people on the spot in front of others-best to have conversations one-on-one rather than in a group as they are very aware of what the community will think of them.

## HOW CAN THE CHURCH AND CHRISTIANS HELP?

Churches and Christians have been pivotal in welcoming refugees and helping them to get settled. Some of the major resettlement agencies in the U.S. are faith-based such as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and World Relief. Thank you for your desire to help the Afghan people. There are many ways to help whether it be part of a team assisting refugees on the bases before they have been connected to a resettlement agency, volunteering with a resettlement agency as a volunteer, or welcoming an Afghan family who have moved into your neighborhood. Each agency will have their own criteria and programs.

## Ideas for Helping

- Provide cultural orientation
- Teach life skills for living in the new country-a lot of things are done differently in Afghanistan such as setting up a bank account, budgeting, paying bills, going through mail (one thing I missed was not getting junk mail in Afghanistan), shopping, laundromat, setting kids up for school and learning how the school system works, learning how to use transportation, finding a place to live (after they are out in the community), finding a park and other recreational activities, etc.
- Provide practical assistance that will help them with their needs.
- Teach/tutor in English
- Engage teens in sports and other activities. Exercise is really good for mental health.
- Lead play/games/activities for children
- Lead activities for girls/teens-they are very creative and love music and dance as well as other activities
- Build relationships by sitting, drinking tea together, listening-men with men and women with women
- Provide psychosocial support
- If you are fluent in one of the languages of Afghanistan, provide interpretive services
- Provide clothing and other essentials (many have just come with a backpack or nothing at all)
- Link to resources and supports (e.g. linguistic, legal, community resources, health care, etc.).
- Establish routine and consistency where you can (the activity or visits at the same time on certain days). This can be very soothing in light of all the changes and adjustments that have provided a destabilizing factor, especially for children.
- Listen to their stories, be a learner, and draw on their strengths to empower them to say “you matter, your story matters.”
- Invite them to do things rather than doing things for them. Many have been professionals in Afghanistan and not to be able to do things like they used to can be very demoralizing. So engage them in things that can give them meaning and empowerment such as asking them to help out with things, asking for their ideas. At the same time, they may be so stressed/traumatized that it will be difficult to think and make decisions-in that way, you can invite them to do something more activity based rather than cognitive based.
- Pray. They are religious so they understand the value of prayer and you can ask if it would be okay to pray for them in Jesus name (but better if one-on-one and not in front of others who may be watching unless you are praying with the group). You can also teach them how

we pray in Jesus name and why. Often they will come to you for help, and you can turn that into an opportunity to ask the only One who can really help and minister to their needs.

- Maintain boundaries-don't offer to help or make promises on something you can't fulfill. They may be looking to you for the solutions like helping their family members leave Afghanistan. Let them know, I am not able to do xxx but I CAN do xxxx. "I acknowledge your pain and I am here with you now."

As you are serving the Afghan people, please be sure to take care of yourself emotionally and physically as that self-care is important. In as much as the Afghan people are valuable, you are valuable too!

You might ask, can I share my faith with them? Yes, but best in the context of relationship and with wisdom and sensitivity. Muslims value faith and understand followers of Jesus as "People of the Book." They believe in Jesus as a prophet and not as the Messiah. We want to be witnesses of God's love and truth but take time to build relationship, loving them in Jesus name through action, praying for and with them, sharing Scripture and Bible stories at appropriate times (such as from Psalms which is called the *Zabur*) that can speak to their situation and bring encouragement and hope. You can identify yourself as a follower of Jesus. The term "Christian" has a negative connotation associated with what is seen on Western TV and culture.

We want to model that we are people of faith by how we interact with others, with God, and with the Word (respecting the Bible, not writing in it, not laying in on the floor). We want to be responsive to the Holy Spirit, but also sensitive to their context. It can appear as a betrayal to their family and community and with it a lot of consequences they have to weigh in the here-and-now. Yet, in Him there is eternal life and we can offer Good News. There are things you may want to invite them to do as part of your life and family, and one may be to invite them to your church. Church may feel very foreign/western to them so a smaller group may be a better context but ask them if that is okay. If unsure of how to minister God's love to the Afghan people, you can always try to reach out for advice and input from those who have experience serving the people in-country or abroad.

**May the Lord bless you as you seek to be a blessing  
to the Afghan people God has placed in your life!**

*\*Please feel free to pass this resource along to anyone who might benefit.\**

## DARI LANGUAGE

English	Dari	Response
Hello	salAm	
Hello there	salAm Alekum	Walekum asalam
How are you?	chetOr astEn? (formal) chetOr asti (informal- children/teens/friends)	Ma khub astEm (I'm good) Bad nEs tashakur (Not bad, thank you) Shukur (Thanks be to God)
Welcome	khush Amaden	khush bAshen (be happy)
What is your name?	nAme shumA chist? (formal) nAme tu chist?(informal)	
My name is _____	nAme ma _____ ast	
Please	lutfan	
Excuse me, sorry	bubakhshEn	
Please, you first	bufarmAyEn	
Thank you	tashakur	qAbili tashakur nest (don't mention it)
Yes	baIE (also used when answering the phone)	
No	nE	
I don't know	ma na mefAmum	
How old are you (to a child)	Chand sol dAri?	
Good bye (God be with you)	bAmAne khudA	
Goodbye (God look after you)	KhudA Hafez	
Where?	kujA?	
Here/not here	Inja/ Inja nEs	
There/not there	Unja/ Unja nEs	
What's that?	U chl s?	
I am going	ma mErum	

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## RESOURCES

### Culture Resources

A general website on Afghan culture

<https://about-afghanistan.squarespace.com/custom-and-culture>

Culture from the perspective of Afghan women

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZKQUoxisnU>

*Enjoy Afghanistan.* A book on Afghan culture by IAM, a NGO that has worked in Afghanistan for many years.

<https://www.interlitfoundation.org/culture-history/enjoy-afghanistan>

Afghan culture and nutrition by the Australian government

<https://metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/dietetic-profile-afghan.pdf>

*Afghan-Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture*

<https://www.amazon.com/Afghanistan-Culture-Smart-Essential-Customs/dp/1857336798>

*Hai Maidan Tai Maidan* Afghanistan travel program in English if you are interested to see the cities in Afghanistan

[https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=hai+maidan+tai+maidan](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=hai+maidan+tai+maidan)

Lesson plans and resources on teaching American culture to refugees

<http://www.culturalorientation.net>

### Language Resources

Language and Resource books

<https://www.interlitfoundation.org/publications>

IAM has stored various language materials made available. Check out the dropbox for more in-depth language learning

<https://www.iam-afghanistan.org/lcp/>

YouTube has various videos on Dari and Pashto language

One example is the Dari Tutor First Words in Dari:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZSonudOWT4>

## **Spiritual Resources**

Various Dari, Pashto, Hazaragi, Turkmen Resources

<https://afghanbibles.org/eng/resources>

Pashto Radio, poetry, testimonies

<https://pashtozaray.org/en/>

Pashto TV, video, music

<https://pashtotv.com/>

Dari/Pashto Bibles, books, and resources

<https://afghanmediacentre.org>

Afghan Christian Media

<https://hope4afghans.com/en>

Messages in Dari by an Afghan pastor

<http://www.afghantv.com>

Christian Resource APPS for download in Dari/Pashto and other languages:

5fish

Bible.is

JesusFilm

## **Mental Health Resources**

<https://beyonddisaster.bible> In English and other languages but not Dari/Pashto

Beyond Disaster is a great resource by the American Bible Study Trauma Healing Institute the for those who have gone through disasters. Talks about trauma responses and what you can do, along with Scripture verses.

National Child Traumatic Stress Network has information on child refugee trauma

<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/refugee-trauma>

WHO Mental Health promotion and mental health healthcare in refugees and migrants

[https://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/386563/mental-health-eng.pdf%3Fua%3D1](https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/386563/mental-health-eng.pdf%3Fua%3D1)

Mental Health fact sheets in Dari and other languages in Australia

[https://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcht.nsf/PresentMultilingualResourceByTopic?Open&x=Mental\\_health&s=Dari](https://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcht.nsf/PresentMultilingualResourceByTopic?Open&x=Mental_health&s=Dari)

## Refugee Information

US Resettlement Agencies

<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/us-resettlement-partners.html>

How churches can respond to Afghan Refugees Sep 21

<https://mtw.org/opportunity-details/missions-connect-the-afghan-refugee-crisis>

Afghan Crisis: How to help our Neighbors by LIRS (Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service-A resettlement agency)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_6H4FzQEWng](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6H4FzQEWng)

World Relief Helping Our Allies Info Page

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

*This guide was envisioned out of a collaboration of those seeking to help Afghans transitioning to their new home, Their heart for God and their tireless efforts to serve the Afghan people is an inspiration. It was written by a gal who was born in Asia, grew up in the U.S. and at one point wanted blue eyes but came to acceptance as she understood the beauty of her heritage and how God created her. She lived and served in Afghanistan and various other countries in Central Asia and the Middle East, has a passion for God, and a yearning to see people's hearts healed and come into relationship with Jesus. After almost a decade on the field, this gal became a therapist to help those impacted by war, disasters, and life challenges. Special thanks to a dear friend who also served the Afghan people and assisted in reviewing and giving feedback to make this guide better. Teamwork is awesome! To God be the glory!*

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