

Operation Allies Welcome

Afghan Resettlement Backgrounder for Community Volunteers

June 2022

On August 29, 2021, President Biden directed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to lead and coordinate Operation Allies Welcome (OAW), which involves ongoing efforts across the public and private sectors to resettle vulnerable Afghans, including those who worked alongside the U.S. government and military in Afghanistan over the past two decades.

Typically, initial resettlement of refugees to the United States, which includes housing assistance, enrollment in services, and provision of basic necessities, is conducted by nine national resettlement agencies and their networks of local agencies and partners. This initial resettlement of 30-90 days after arrival in the local community is funded by the Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). The Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is responsible for funding the complementary programs that provide longer-term integration and self-sufficiency support such as cash and medical assistance, employment, case management and other services through states and local agencies. Most ORR services are available for one to five years after arrival or eligibility.

While the tens of thousands of Afghans who entered the United States last August were granted parole, which does not normally come with federal benefits, Congress passed legislation and provided funding for refugee resettlement-like benefits. As a result, the federal government was called to resettle and provide benefits to more than 72,000 Afghan evacuees from domestic military installations (“Safe Havens”) into communities across the country. The federal government launched a multi-agency effort involving all components of the refugee resettlement community, including federal agencies, state governments, non-governmental organizations, community groups, and individuals.

The unprecedented demand for services following the evacuation faced numerous barriers, including the reduction in refugee service funding in recent years, which led to a major decline in resettlement agency capacity to respond to the emergency; the short window between evacuation and arrival for more than 72,000 Afghans; the ongoing pandemic; and a severe nationwide affordable housing and staffing shortage.

OAW achieved historic rates of resettlement and resettled tens of thousands of Afghan evacuees into their new communities to meet a commitment to resettling them off Safe Havens by mid-February 2022. To achieve this milestone, federal partners in coordination with resettlement agencies and community organizations created innovative solutions to help address the needs of the thousands of new Afghan arrivals. State governments, nonprofit agencies, community partners, and volunteers are still working around the clock to meet the pressing need for services.

Afghan Placement and Assistance Program and Services

The U.S. Department of State designed the Afghan Placement and Assistance Program (APA) in response to the extraordinary effort to relocate and resettle more than 72,000 Afghan

humanitarian parolees in a few short months. APA is broadly similar to the traditional PRM-funded Reception & Placement (R&P) refugee resettlement program that has been in place for decades.

While APA was made available to all Afghans at Safe Havens, some chose to depart Safe Havens prematurely rather than wait for the APA assurance and placement process that formally connects arrivals to resettlement agencies. Those who independently departed a Safe Haven were counseled prior to departure and advised that APA services and assistance may be delayed or even unavailable if they forego their assurance assignment, walk into a resettlement agency in the destination to which they travel independently, and request benefits. They were strongly counseled that only those individuals with independent support systems that could provide long-term housing should consider independently departing. Nevertheless, thousands of Afghan parolees chose to depart Safe Havens and travel on their own to their chosen location. With the closure of the eight original Safe Havens in early/mid 2022, Phase I of OAW has been completed and we have transitioned to phase two with the majority of parole processing taking place overseas. In Phase II, some Afghan new arrivals continue to independently depart from the sole Safe Haven in Virginia.

In many instances, resettlement agencies are unable to serve individuals due to the need to prioritize services for the Afghan cases the agencies have assured through the established APA assurance process, which seeks to ensure that the necessary capacity exists in impacted locations to reunify those joining immediate family members.

Support Provided by APA

The APA Program provides Afghans granted humanitarian parole with initial resettlement services for 30 to 90 days after arrival as they begin to rebuild their lives in the United States. In coordination with publicly supported refugee service and assistance programs, resettlement agencies and community partners focus on assisting refugees to achieve economic self-sufficiency through employment as soon as possible after their arrival in the United States. Local refugee resettlement agencies and community partners provide services and assistance to include:

- A one-time amount of \$1,225 per capita is available for agencies to use to fund critical direct assistance needs for each Afghan such as housing and basic necessities, including food, clothing, and furnishings during the first 30-90 days in the arrivals' new communities;
- Cultural orientation to prepare Afghans for their new lives in America;
- Assistance with enrollment in school, English language training, and social, health, and employment services, as relevant and eligible; and
- Assistance with accessing immigration assistance.

Additional Support for Afghan Humanitarian Parolees

Many Afghan humanitarian parolees are eligible for many longer-term resettlement services and programs funded through ORR. These programs include cash and medical assistance, employment services, integration, interpretation and translation, childcare, citizenship and naturalization, and other support services. Furthermore, Congress authorized ORR to provide

Afghan humanitarian parolees with additional services, including emergency/short and long-term housing and immigration-related legal assistance. For an overview of the benefits and services for which Afghan Humanitarian Parolees may be eligible, see the [ORR Benefits for Afghan Humanitarian Parolees Fact Sheet](#), available in English, Dari and Pashto. Federal partners are also coordinating to ensure that the government meets the congressionally mandated deadline for interviewing Afghan asylum applicants within 45 days and adjudicating their cases within 150 days, in the absence of exceptional circumstances.

Challenges and Opportunities

The large number and fast pace of arrivals at local resettlement agencies nationwide created distinct challenges and opportunities, including:

- *Emergency resettlement response:* In Phase I of OAW, the resettlement agencies, community partners, sponsors, and volunteers, state and local governments, and several USG agencies resettled over 72,000 Afghan allies and evacuees in approximately five months, a scope and pace that were unprecedented.
- *Condensed timeframe to secure permanent housing:* In the traditional refugee resettlement program, resettlement agencies typically have sufficient advance notice to secure permanent housing for new arrivals. For APA, many resettlement agencies had less than a week advance notice of arrival, which necessitated the use of temporary housing. Given the extremely tight housing market, it has been necessary in many areas of the country for Afghans to stay in temporary housing accommodations, such as extended stay locations and/or hotels, while local resettlement staff work diligently to locate affordable, safe, and sanitary long-term housing as soon as possible.
- *COVID-19 impacts on service delivery and resettlement staff:* For many months, resettlement staff were at times unable to conduct in-person services due to COVID-19 precautions. Afghans received virtual check-ins and service delivery, as has been the case with refugee resettlement throughout the pandemic.
- *Documentation challenges:* Due to the need to implement new documentation systems and processes, there have been delays in producing and disseminating documents to Afghans such as the DHS Arrival/Departure Records (I-94), Employment Authorization Documents (EADs), and Social Security cards. Multiple government agencies worked together to address this issue, which is beyond the control of local resettlement agencies.

Resettlement Service Delivery Inquiries

It is important for Afghans served through the APA Program to develop a relationship with their case manager and other affiliate staff. The chain of command within the local resettlement agency is the best mechanism for addressing client requests, questions, and grievances. Afghans should be advised that patience toward their local resettlement affiliate is critical. Resettlement staff are working hard to provide services as timely and effectively as possible.

If a volunteer or community member feels it is necessary, they should first elevate their concern to the relevant local resettlement agency or community partner that is serving the case. As described above, there are cases who independently departed from the Safe Havens and may not be assigned to a resettlement agency. For local agency contact information, go to the [Afghan](#)

[Placement and Assistance \(APA\) Program Affiliate Directory](#). All local resettlement agencies have established beneficiary grievance/feedback policies which all clients are informed about at intake. Should the concern require further escalation, direct the concern to PRM's grievance inbox at APAGrievances@state.gov and ORR's grievance inbox at RefugeeProgramsGrievance@acf.hhs.gov.

If a volunteer is concerned about an Afghan client's well-being or has received a complaint about resettlement programs and services, they are encouraged to critically assess the situation. If the immediate health and welfare of the Afghan is at risk, the appropriate authorities should be notified, and the resettlement agency or community partner contacted.

Resources

Refugee resettlement is at its core a public, private, and community partnership. OAW has required a whole-of-government response, and it would not have been possible without the commitment, patience, and dedication of the resettlement communities. For more information, please visit:

- **Afghan Assistance Resources:** <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/refugees/afghan-assistance-resources>
- **Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange (CORE), Working with Afghans:** <https://coresourceexchange.org/working-with-afghans/>
- **SettleInUS Facebook Page:** [Settle In - Home | Facebook](#)
- **DHS Operation Allies Welcome:** <https://www.dhs.gov/allieswelcome>
- **Refugee Processing Center, Afghans Granted Humanitarian Parole:** <https://www.wrapsnet.org/afghans-granted-humanitarian-parole/>
- **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Resources:** https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/field_policy_mgt/operation-allies-welcome