AFGHANS

AN INTRODUCTION FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS



A BACKGROUNDER FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

This cultural backgrounder was developed by Switchboard and is based on a resource originally created by Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange (CORE). The content has been adapted and expanded for the UK context by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) UK

PURPOSE OF THIS BACKGROUNDER

This backgrounder contains historical, political, and cultural information to cultivate a general understanding of Afghans arriving in the UK. The ongoing crisis in Afghanistan is complex and spans decades. This backgrounder was produced to aid U.S. Resettlement Agencies (RAs) and local service providers in providing orientation and culturally appropriate services to newly arrived Afghans. It has been adapted and expanded for the UK context by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) UK with permission from Switchboard, the original developer. The information provided is intended as guidance and does not represent the needs and challenges of all Afghans. As such, service providers are encouraged to adapt their services as appropriate.

Information in this document draws on a variety of trusted resources, including scholarly books, articles, reports, and websites of trusted research organisations. See the bibliography for a list of resources and information about the authors.

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INTRODUCTION: AFGHANISTAN'S POLITICAL HISTORY AND PRESENCE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Situated at the strategic crossroads of European, Central Asian, and East Asian civilisations, modern Afghanistan reflects a long history of shifting regional powers and warring regimes.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Afghanistan's political development was shaped by competition between the British and Russian empires for influence in Central Asia. Following three Anglo-Afghan wars between 1839 and 1919, Afghanistan secured its independence in foreign affairs from Britain in 1919. The country subsequently experienced periods of relative stability alongside significant political change and upheaval.

In April 1978, the Saur Revolution brought the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) to power. Political repression, internal divisions and growing opposition contributed to escalating instability. In December 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, intensifying the conflict and triggering large-scale displacement. Millions of Afghans fled to neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan and Iran, while others sought refuge further afield.

Resistance to the Soviet presence was led by Afghan opposition groups commonly referred to as the Mujahideen, supported by various international actors. Following sustained pressure from the international community and resistance from the Mujahideen, the Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989. The Mujahideen groups were composed primarily of Afghans, although some fighters from other Muslim-majority countries also fought alongside them.

In 1992, the Soviet-backed government collapsed, creating a power vacuum that led to another civil war between competing Mujahideen factions. The conflict continued as the Taliban emerged as a major force and captured Kabul in 1996, although fighting continued between the Taliban and opposing groups. The Taliban imposed a strict interpretation of Islamic law, including significant restrictions on women's rights and social participation.

Following the September 11 attacks in 2001, the United States, supported by the United Kingdom and other international partners, intervened militarily in Afghanistan alongside Afghan forces, including the Northern Alliance. This contributed to the establishment of an interim administration run by Hamid Karzai. During this time, Afghanistan underwent significant political, social and economic changes, despite continued conflict and insecurity. Afghans continued to arrive in the UK through asylum and family reunion routes, alongside formal resettlement and relocation schemes introduced over time.

On August 15, 2021, following the withdrawal of U.S., UK and other international forces, the Taliban took control of Kabul after a rapid advance throughout the country. Since then, they have reintroduced strict controls on personal freedoms, particularly affecting women and girls' education, employment, freedom of movement and participation in public life. The Taliban's takeover and the deteriorating security situation prompted emergency evacuation operations by the UK and other international governments.



TIMELINE FOR RESETTLEMENT PATHWAYS

Following the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the UK evacuated approximately 15,000 people from Afghanistan under Operation PITTING. The UK Government had introduced the **Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)** in April 2021 and announced the **Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)** in August 2021, formally opening it in January 2022. ARAP was established to relocate eligible Afghans who worked for or alongside the UK Government in Afghanistan, including interpreters and other staff, and their eligible family members. ACRS provided resettlement routes for certain Afghans considered at risk due to their circumstances or links to the UK, including those evacuated during Operation PITTING and those referred through UNHCR and other specified pathways.

Apr 2021

ARAP introduced

Aug 2021

- **Operation PITTING:** ~15,000 evacuated
- **ACRS** Announced

The UK Government also introduced **Communities for Afghans (CfA)**, a sponsorship scheme based on the Community Sponsorship model to support eligible Afghan households resettled in the UK.

Mar 2024

Communities for Afghans (CfA) introduced

The **Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP)** was established in December 2024 to bring together ARAP and ACRS schemes into a single programme. In July 2025, the UK Government closed the ARP's constituent routes to new applications or referrals. Existing eligible cases continue to be processed.

Dec 2024

ARAP + ACRS merged into **Afghan Resettlement Programme**

July 2025

- **ARP closed** to new cases
- Existing eligible cases continue to be processed



Through CfA, local Sponsor Groups work with local authorities and Principal Sponsors to welcome and support Afghan households as they settle into their new communities. They provide practical and social support, helping households access local services, settle into their accommodation and build community connections.



CONDITIONS IN THIRD COUNTRIES

Afghans living outside Afghanistan face serious challenges, including poor living conditions, food insecurity, limited access to healthcare and education, and restrictions on employment and other rights. Those without secure legal status or documentation may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation, detention, deportation and other protection risks. Conditions vary between countries and according to an individual's legal and documentation status.

Pakistan and Iran continue to host some of the largest Afghan populations outside Afghanistan. According to UNHCR, as of 31 December 2025, there were approximately 1.42 million Afghan refugees and other Afghans in need of international protection in Pakistan and 1.64 million in Iran. The precise number of Afghans without formal refugee or other documentation is difficult to establish, as documentation status varies and populations are subject to ongoing movement and return.

In recent years, Pakistan and Iran have returned large numbers of Afghans to Afghanistan, including through deportations. Between September 2023 and 30 May 2026, approximately 6.04 million Afghans returned from the two countries, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The 1951 Refugee Convention provides the international framework for refugee protection. Iran is a party to the Convention, while Pakistan is not and provides registered Afghan refugees with Proof of Registration (PoR) cards granting temporary legal status.









GEOGRAPHY

Afghanistan is a landlocked country in South-Central Asia, bordering six countries: Pakistan to the east and south, Iran to the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north, and China to the northeast. Covering approximately 652,864 square kilometres, Afghanistan is around 2.7 times the size of the United Kingdom. Its geographical position places it at a crossroads between South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East and China.

Afghanistan's rugged and diverse terrain consists of mountains and plains in the north and southwest. The Hindu Kush is a mountain range that pushes from the Pamir region into central and western Afghanistan. Most of Afghanistan has a semi-arid climate, thus allowing the country to experience all four seasons. According to the United Nations, the country has experienced serious drought in recent years, affecting agricultural production and threatening the livelihoods of many.





ETHNIC GROUPS AND INTERETHNIC CONSIDERATIONS

Afghanistan is ethnically diverse, with many groups, each with distinct histories and cultures. Many Afghans are multilingual, and language does not always correspond directly to ethnic identity. While some communities have historically been concentrated in particular regions, these are not necessarily exclusive areas of residence. Ethnic affiliation can shape social organisation, intersecting with language, region, family and community networks.





Interethnic conflict in Afghanistan has a long history, shaped by political, economic, sectarian and religious affiliations. Tensions among groups, including Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks, have been influenced by successive conflicts and political changes. Following the 1979 Soviet invasion, the Mujahideen resistance comprised diverse ethnic and political groups, involving both divisions and cooperation.

These tensions continued through the civil war after the Soviet withdrawal, shaping relationships between some communities. Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, concerns about the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities have continued. Hazaras and other Shia communities have historically faced persecution and security threats, while other ethnic minorities have also reported discrimination and unequal treatment. Experiences vary, and ethnic identity should not be assumed to determine a person's political views, experiences or relationships.

Interethnic tensions may continue after Afghans arrive in the UK, although they can take different forms. Rather than physical violence, they may influence how communities form and interact. Shared language and culture can help people feel a sense of belonging with others from the same ethnic group, but these boundaries can also reinforce discrimination between groups.

LANGUAGE

Afghanistan is linguistically diverse, with more than 30 languages spoken across the country. Dari and Pashto are the two official languages. Other languages include Uzbeki, Turkmeni, Balochi, Pashai, Nuristani and a number of Pamiri languages. Language use varies by region and ethnic background, and many Afghans speak more than one language.

Dari is a variety of Persian widely spoken across northern, western and central Afghanistan, including in Kabul. It is closely related to Iranian Persian and Tajiki Persian, although there are differences in vocabulary, pronunciation and usage. The terms Dari and Farsi may both be used by Afghans when referring to the language, depending on context and personal preference. Hazaragi, spoken predominantly by Hazaras, is a variety of Dari with distinctive vocabulary and pronunciation. Pashto is an Indo-Iranian language spoken predominantly by Pashtuns, particularly in southern and eastern Afghanistan. It has several regional varieties, with differences in vocabulary and pronunciation. Many Pashto speakers also speak Dari, particularly in areas where different linguistic and ethnic communities live alongside one another.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

Role of Family

Family is considered one of the most critical institutions in Afghan society. A typical household consists of immediate and extended family members, where parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles share child-raising responsibilities. Family members often recognise their role and responsibility for the welfare of their family. Children may learn to do what is best for their family by placing others' needs over their own. There is also a direct correlation between respect and age within Afghan families and general society. Family members may consult with their elders (i.e., grandparents, parents, elder siblings) before making a decision or commitment. Afghan society is also patriarchal, patrilineal, and, in some communities, patrilocal. Men have traditionally been expected to provide for the family and may have greater authority in family decision-making, although these roles vary between families and generations.



Marriage

Afghans may prefer to build relationships through marriage with families that they know well. They may consider factors such as religion, ethnicity, social and economic background, and in some cases, level of education when arranging or approving marriages. Women have traditionally moved to their husband's home to live with or near their in-laws after marriage, particularly in patrilocal family structures, although practices vary between families and communities.

Polygamy is legal in Afghanistan, with a man permitted to marry up to four wives subject to specific conditions. Islamic principles require a husband to treat his wives equitably, including in relation to financial support and material rights.

Divorce is traditionally and religiously permitted, but social attitudes towards it can be negative, particularly for women. Limited financial independence, social stigma, and expectations around maintaining family relationships and honour can make it more difficult for women to leave or end a marriage.







Women and Society

The position of women in Afghan society has been shaped by historical, cultural, political and religious factors, and has varied considerably across different periods and communities. Since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, extensive restrictions have been imposed on women's and girls' education, employment, freedom of movement and participation in public life. These restrictions remain in place and have further limited women's access to education, employment, justice and other aspects of public life.

Domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence are also serious concerns. According to a United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) report, Afghanistan has the highest rate of violence against girls and women. The report indicates that “9 out of 10 women experience at least one form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime” in Afghanistan.

Child Protection

Due to the country's ongoing humanitarian and economic crisis, children can experience violence, abuse and exploitation. According to UNICEF, around three-quarters of children aged two and 14 experience violent discipline at home. Children may also be involved in child labour. Girls face risks including child marriage, gender-based violence and sexual violence, while boys may face particular risks of hazardous child labour and recruitment or use by armed groups.

Religion

Islam is the principal religion of Afghanistan, and the majority of Afghans are Sunni Muslims, with a significant Shia Muslim minority. There are also small communities of other faiths, including Sikhs, Hindus and Baha'is, although the size of these communities has declined significantly over recent decades due to persecution, displacement and other factors. Together, non-Muslim communities now represent less than 1 percent of the population.

Islam plays an important role in the lives of many Afghans and can influence day-to-day practices, family and community life, celebrations and dietary practices. However, people vary in how they practise their religion. Some may pray regularly, observe religious dietary requirements and follow more conservative forms of dress, while others may practise their faith less strictly or visibly. Religious practice can also vary according to individual, ethnic, regional and generational factors.

Since returning to power in August 2021, the Taliban have increasingly enforced their interpretation of Islamic law. Blasphemy and apostasy are treated as serious offences, and individuals accused of violating religious norms may face severe consequences.









Diet

Islam forbids Muslims from consuming alcohol, pork and its byproducts, and animals that have not been slaughtered according to Islamic requirements. Permissible foods are called halal and impermissible foods are called haram. Some Afghan Muslims strictly observe halal and haram dietary requirements, while others may be more flexible in their practice.

Ramadan

Ramadan is a holy month in Islam and occurs during the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. As the Islamic calendar is approximately 10–11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar, Ramadan begins around 10–11 days earlier each year. Muslims who observe Ramadan generally fast from dawn until sunset, refraining from food, drink and smoking during daylight hours.

Ramadan is widely observed in Afghanistan, where it can influence daily routines, working hours, social activities and family life. However, the extent to which people observe Ramadan varies between individuals and families. Not everyone is required to fast. Children who have not reached puberty, pregnant or breastfeeding women, older people, people who are ill, and people travelling may be exempt, depending on their circumstances and individual religious practice. Women are also exempt during their menstruation and generally make up the missed days later. Medical needs should be considered individually, as views differ on whether particular medicines, injections or vaccinations affect the fast.

At sunset, Muslims break their fast, often beginning with dates and water before eating a meal.





- Some Afghan families in the UK may check food ingredients and meat preparation to ensure they meet halal requirements.
- When hosting Afghan guests, explain the ingredients used. Popular dishes include qabili palaw, mantu and ashak.
- During Ramadan, offer flexibility around working hours and avoid late-afternoon meetings or activities where possible, as those fasting may feel more tired or low on energy.
- Be mindful that some may fast during daylight hours and, where possible, avoid eating or drinking in front of them.

Eid

Ramadan is followed by Eid Ul-Fitr, a three-day holiday marking the successful completion of Ramadan. Around two months later, Eid Ul-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice, is observed and coincides with the annual Hajj Pilgrimage. Both are important occasions in Afghanistan, centred on prayer, family gatherings and shared meals.

Preparations often begin days in advance, with homes cleaned, new clothes bought for children and traditional foods prepared. On Eid morning, people dress in their finest and attend congregational prayers at a mosque or open prayer ground (eidgah).

The rest of the celebration centres on visiting. Younger people call first on parents and elders, then on relatives, neighbours, and friends. Every home offers endless tea alongside sweets such as kulcha cookies, dry fruits, with larger meals of palaw, mantu, and kebabs. Children may receive Eidi, small gifts of money. Women and men often socialise in separate gatherings, though this varies by region and generation. At Eid Ul-Adha, families who can afford it sacrifice an animal and share the meat with their household, relatives and friends, and the poor. Today, many families in Afghanistan cannot afford this, and public festivities such as fairs and music are far more restricted than before 2021.



In the UK, Afghan families keep the heart of these traditions while adapting to circumstance. Prayers are held at local mosques or hired venues, often with large crowds, and the date may differ by a day between families depending on moon sightings. As Eid is not a public holiday, people may take leave from work and children may miss school, making flexibility from employers and schools espeically helpful.

For recently arrived families, Eid can be difficult as well as joyful, as they may lack extended family or the means for new clothes and generous hospitality. Yet they will often still insist on offering tea, sweets and meal to every visitor.

- When greeting during Eid, say "Eid Mubarak". Greet elders first, and use your right hand when giving or receiving anything. Wait to see whether someone of the opposite sex offers a handshake. A hand over the heart is a polite alternative.
- If you are invited to an Afghan family's home for Eid, say yes if you feel comfortable and are available. An invitation is a real mark of trust and respect. If you can't attend, decline warmly and thank them for inviting you. You may consider visiting briefly another day, as Eid lasts about three days.
- Accept tea if you feel comfortable, even if only a little, and follow the host's lead if men and women sit separately. Ask before taking photographs, especially of women and children. A visit of an hour or so is typical, since hosts may have many callers. Thank the host warmly, and offer a sincere "Eid Mubarak" on leaving.
- Eid can bring grief alongside joy for those separated from family. Offer company, and let people choose whether to talk about home.

Nawroz

Nawroz (also written Nowruz or Nawrouz) marks the Afghan New Year and the beginning of spring, usually on 20 or 21 March. It has deep historical roots in the region and is celebrated across Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. For many Afghans, it represents renewal, hope, and the promise of a fresh start.



Preparations may include cleaning the home, buying new clothes, and preparing special foods. Haft mewa, a fruit-and-nut compote made with dried fruits and nuts, is a well-known Nawroz tradition, while some families also prepare samanak, a sweet dish made from sprouted wheat. Families and friends may visit one another, share meals, and enjoy picnics as spring arrives.

Nawroz has diverse historical and religious associations. While some Afghans celebrate it as an important cultural tradition, others do not observe it for religious or personal reasons. Since the Taliban's return to power, public celebrations in Afghanistan have faced significant restrictions, although some families continue to mark the occasion privately.

In the UK, families who celebrate may prepare traditional foods, visit relatives, or gather with friends and community members. For those separated from loved ones, Nawroz can also bring a sense of loss, particularly when celebrations are difficult to recreate away from home.

- If a family celebrates Nawroz, you can greet them by saying "Nawroz Mubarak" (Happy New Year). Asking about their plans or traditions can also be a thoughtful way to acknowledge the occasion. Avoid assuming that everyone celebrates it.
- Nawroz is not a UK public holiday. Where possible, be mindful of the date when arranging appointments or activities.
- If families share food or traditions, show interest without expecting them to explain or represent Afghan culture. Participation in community celebrations should always be optional.
- If you are planning a community event around Nawroz, consider asking families what they would find meaningful. Sharing food, music, crafts or activities associated with spring may provide opportunities for connection, but avoid assuming everyone will want to participate.



SERVICE DELIVERY AND COMMUNITY ORIENTATION

The following sections contain detailed and contextualised information about working with Afghans while navigating community orientation and different areas of service provision. As noted previously, service providers should adapt this information to individual circumstances and needs.

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

For Afghan newcomers, aspects of life in the UK may be new and present challenges in their cultural adjustment. These may include encountering Islamophobia, xenophobia, and anti immigrant sentiment, navigating unfamiliar social and cultural norms, and adapting to changes in family dynamics.

In some Afghan families, men may expect their wives to stay home and maintain traditional family roles, while some women may seek greater independence, exercise their rights and participate more actively in society. These differences can sometimes create uncertainty or tension as families adjust to life in the UK.

Some Afghan newcomers may have had limited opportunities to interact with people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds outside of Afghanistan. As a result, some social norms, expectations and communication styles in the UK may be unfamiliar.

To support their adjustment and participation in the wider community, consider the following:

- Understand Afghanistan's history, the circumstances that have led to displacement, and the diversity of Afghan cultural practices and values.
- Build trust and encourage open dialogue: Use active listening to explore challenges arising from differences in social and family life, allowing space for different perspectives.
- Create an inclusive environment: Use open-ended questions and scenarios to encourage both men and women to share their perspectives on family roles, independence and changing family dynamics, without making assumptions about individual beliefs.
- Be patient with communication differences: Recognise that social norms and communication styles may differ, and allow time for newcomers to feel comfortable navigating their new environment.
- Encourage reflection and learning: Create opportunities for families to reflect on their cultural identities, experiences and expectations of life in the UK. Foster respectful discussions about belonging, adaptation and mutual understanding without fear of judgement.

EDUCATION

The education system in Afghanistan has experienced significant challenges over time. Access to education has varied considerably, particularly between rural and urban areas, and many Afghans have had limited opportunities to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills. The quality of teaching and learning has also been affected by limited resources, teacher shortages and disruption to education. Since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, girls have been barred from education beyond Grade 6, and women have been prohibited from attending universities.

Not all Afghans have learned from the same curriculum. Millions of Afghans repatriated from Iran and Pakistan during 2001-2021 and continued their education alongside Afghans who had remained in Afghanistan. Private institutions may implement curricula influenced by or adapted from foreign education systems.

In general, classes can be highly teacher-centred, with an emphasis on rote memorisation. Students may have fewer opportunities to develop critical thinking or engage in inquiry-based learning. Parent engagement with schools may be significantly less common than in the UK. Some parents may place a high level of trust in schools and teachers to make decisions about their children's education and may therefore be less likely to question school administration or teachers' decisions. Some children may have experienced significant disruption, displacement or difficult circumstances and may need additional support in and out of class to succeed in their education.

To help Afghan families and their children with their educational needs, consider the following:

- Orient parents around expectations for supporting their children at school.
- Build trust through different touchpoints, such as one-on-one meetings, community orientation sessions and, where needed, meetings with teachers. Encourage parents to attend parents' evenings and other school meetings to help them become familiar with the UK education system and their roles and responsibilities in supporting their children's education.
- Engage community partners or guest speakers, including valued community members or teachers from the school, as a part of community orientation. These individuals can serve as another entry point to educate parents and create an exchange with Afghan families.
- Prepare to answer questions about higher education and discuss the need to balance work with educational goals.
- Facilitate connections with relevant community-based education programmes, including literacy and digital literacy programmes, informal conversation clubs, and programmes that support access to further education. Where relevant, signpost individuals to UK ENIC for advice on comparing overseas qualifications with UK education standards.
- Signpost teachers and schools to training and resources on supporting refugee children in the classroom, including English as an Additional Language (EAL), inclusive practice and trauma-informed approaches. The Bell Foundation provides guidance and resources specifically for schools welcoming refugee and asylum-seeking learners, including support with EAL, induction, pastoral care and working with parents.
- For more background, see the Teacher Briefing: Afghanistan from the IRC.

EMPLOYMENT

Afghans may enter the UK with varying skills, qualifications and work experience, ranging from professional and government positions to informal or unpaid work, including responsibilities within the home. Some occupations, such as teaching, medicine, engineering, law and senior government positions, may carry higher social prestige, while other types of work may be viewed as lower in status. These perceptions, along with expectations of finding work that reflects previous experience and qualifications, may create challenges when considering entry-level or unfamiliar employment.

Some Afghan newcomers may also have religious or personal preferences about the type of work they are comfortable doing. For example, some may prefer not to work in environments where alcohol or pork is handled or served. Employment experience may also vary by gender, as women and men may have had different opportunities to access education and employment.

In addressing some of these challenges, consider the following:

- Listen actively and learn about the individual's experience, qualifications and goals. Acknowledge their previous experience and explain how the UK job market works. Discuss the value of building UK work experience through employment, volunteering or other opportunities, which may sometimes mean starting in an entry-level role as one step towards long-term career goals.
- Support individuals to identify realistic short- and long-term employment goals, taking into account their financial circumstances, experience, qualifications and aspirations.
- Use a strengths-based approach to explore transferable skills and relevant UK employment pathways. Identify potential barriers, agree practical next steps and signpost to appropriate services for qualification recognition or professional registration where relevant.
- Facilitate open and honest conversations about gender roles and expectations around employment, while recognising that individuals and families may have different views and circumstances.
- Identify jobs that individuals feel comfortable doing and consider factors such as working hours, childcare, travel arrangements, workplace environment and religious or personal preferences.
- Discuss workplace rights and responsibilities, particularly those related to religious practices.
- Where relevant, encourage individuals to continue developing their English language skills after obtaining employment to support career progression. Help them understand UK workplace expectations and the value of building a positive employment history.

HEALTH

Poverty and limited access to adequate healthcare and medical services in Afghanistan have affected preventative care for many people. Some Afghan newcomers may therefore be less familiar with preventative healthcare and may seek medical attention when they experience a health problem. When accessing health services, some may prefer to be seen by medical professionals of the same gender, particularly when discussing sensitive health concerns.

Specific topics may cause discomfort or be considered sensitive. For example, discussing sexual and reproductive health may cause embarrassment, and some may feel uncomfortable seeking support for mental health concerns. At the same time, the resettlement process, from displacement to post-migration may affect emotional wellbeing and contribute to anxiety, depression, or trauma.

To support individuals with health concerns, consider the following tips:

- Provide clear information on how to access healthcare in the UK, including GP services, pharmacies, sexual health services and emergency healthcare. Where needed, provide written information with translation or interpretation and information about relevant local services.
- Make individuals aware that they can request a professional interpreter when accessing NHS services and encourage them to specify their preferred language, such as Dari or Pashto, when booking an appointment. They should not be expected to rely on family members or friends to interpret.
- Explain what people might encounter when accessing healthcare in the UK, including the possibility that they may not receive treatment from someone of the same gender. Where possible, support them to communicate their preferences and understand their options.
- Provide information about healthcare entitlements. For example, some receiving Universal Credit may qualify for help with NHS health costs, depending on their circumstances and earnings.
- Demystify and destigmatise mental health services by using accessible, normalising language and explaining the purpose of these services.
- Where appropriate, connect with trusted faith and community leaders within the Afghan community in the UK to increase awareness of available health and mental health services.
- Discuss health and wellbeing with Afghan newcomers early in the resettlement period. Providing clear information about emotional wellbeing and available support may help individuals feel more comfortable seeking appropriate services. Where appropriate, signpost to local health, mental health and community organisations.

HOUSING

Afghan families may prefer to live independently while remaining close to extended family or within communities where they can interact with other Afghans or Muslims. They may feel more comfortable around people who share similar languages, beliefs and traditions. Living near familiar communities can help reduce feelings of isolation and provide a sense of connection.

Many new arrivals may have expectations about their new living situation and may prefer a larger home rather than an apartment or flat. However, housing availability and financial circumstances may limit the options available. Households in Afghanistan may also be multi-generational and include both immediate and extended family members, which can mean that living arrangements in the UK may feel different from what some families are accustomed to.



Some Afghans may have preferences or concerns about using previously owned items, such as furniture, which may relate to perceptions of cleanliness, status or personal preference.

To help them adjust to their new homes and community, consider the following:

- Explain common UK housing types and how the housing market works, including housing shortages, affordability challenges and the costs of finding suitable accommodation.
- Where second-hand items such as furniture are provided, check that individuals are comfortable with them and, where possible, take their preferences into account.
- Discuss expectations around privacy, hosting visitors and using shared spaces, particularly where family members have different preferences or are adjusting to living in a new home in the UK
- Explain that UK homes may have different layouts, heating systems and waste disposal arrangements, and take time to demonstrate unfamiliar features where needed.



RESETTLEMENT SERVICES

Afghan newcomers may have expectations about life in the UK and the support available to them following resettlement. These expectations may be influenced by information from family, friends, social media and other sources, and may not always reflect the realities of life in the UK.

- Facilitate open and honest conversations about the support available, including what services and insititutions can and cannot provide.
- Provide clear, consistent and realistic information about practical aspects of resettlement, including housing, benefits, employment, healthcare, education and access to English language learning. Explain that some services may involve waiting lists, eligibility criteria or additional steps.
- Emphasise that while services and insititutions can provide support during the transition, individuals and families also play an active role in their own integration and participation in the wider community.
- Recognise that adjustment takes time and that expectations may change as families gain experience of life in the UK. Revisit conversations where needed, particularly when circumstances differ from what families anticipated.
- Where appropriate, signpost individuals and their families to Afghan-led and other community organisations that can provide opportunities to build social connections, access information and participate in community life.

UK LAWS

Afghanistan's legal system has undergone significant changes over the past few decades. Under the previous government, the legal framework included provisions for protecting fundamental rights, although enforcement was inconsistent. Courts applied statutory law alongside Islamic law and customary practices. Since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, the previous constitutional and judicial framework has been significantly altered. The 2004 Constitution has been suspended, and courts now operate under the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law, alongside elements of customary law.

Afghan newcomers will have varied experiences of legal and public institutions. Some may have limited experience with formal legal systems, while others may be reluctant to approach the police or other authorities due to previous experiences or concerns about corruption, inaction or access to justice. In some families and communities, issues such as domestic abuse and family disputes may be viewed as private matters, making it difficult to seek support outside the home.





Some aspects of life in the UK may therefore involve laws, rights and procedures that are unfamiliar to some newcomers. To support them:

- Provide clear, accessible information about UK laws, rights and responsibilities, including child protection, equality and discrimination, driving, employment and housing. Explain potential consequences of breaking the law and make space for questions. If unsure, signpost individuals to trusted sources or qualified legal advice.
- Explain the role of the police and other public authorities, including how they can protect and support people. Where appropriate, explain how information is handled and encourage individuals to ask about confidentiality when seeking help.
- Be mindful that many Afghans may have questions about immigration or family members overseas. Where relevant, signpost them to qualified immigration advisers or solicitors, including legal aid services where available. Avoid providing immigration advice unless appropriately qualified.

CONCLUSION

Resettlement is about more than starting again; it is about having the opportunity to build a future. Afghan newcomers bring their own strengths, skills, experiences and aspirations, shaped by their unique individual journeys and backgrounds. Understanding Afghanistan's cultural and social context can help service providers build trust, recognise individual needs and offer meaningful support without making assumptions.

By taking both the wider cultural context and each person's individual circumstances into account, service providers can help Afghan newcomers feel heard, realise their potential and develop a genuine sense of belonging as they build their lives in the UK.







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