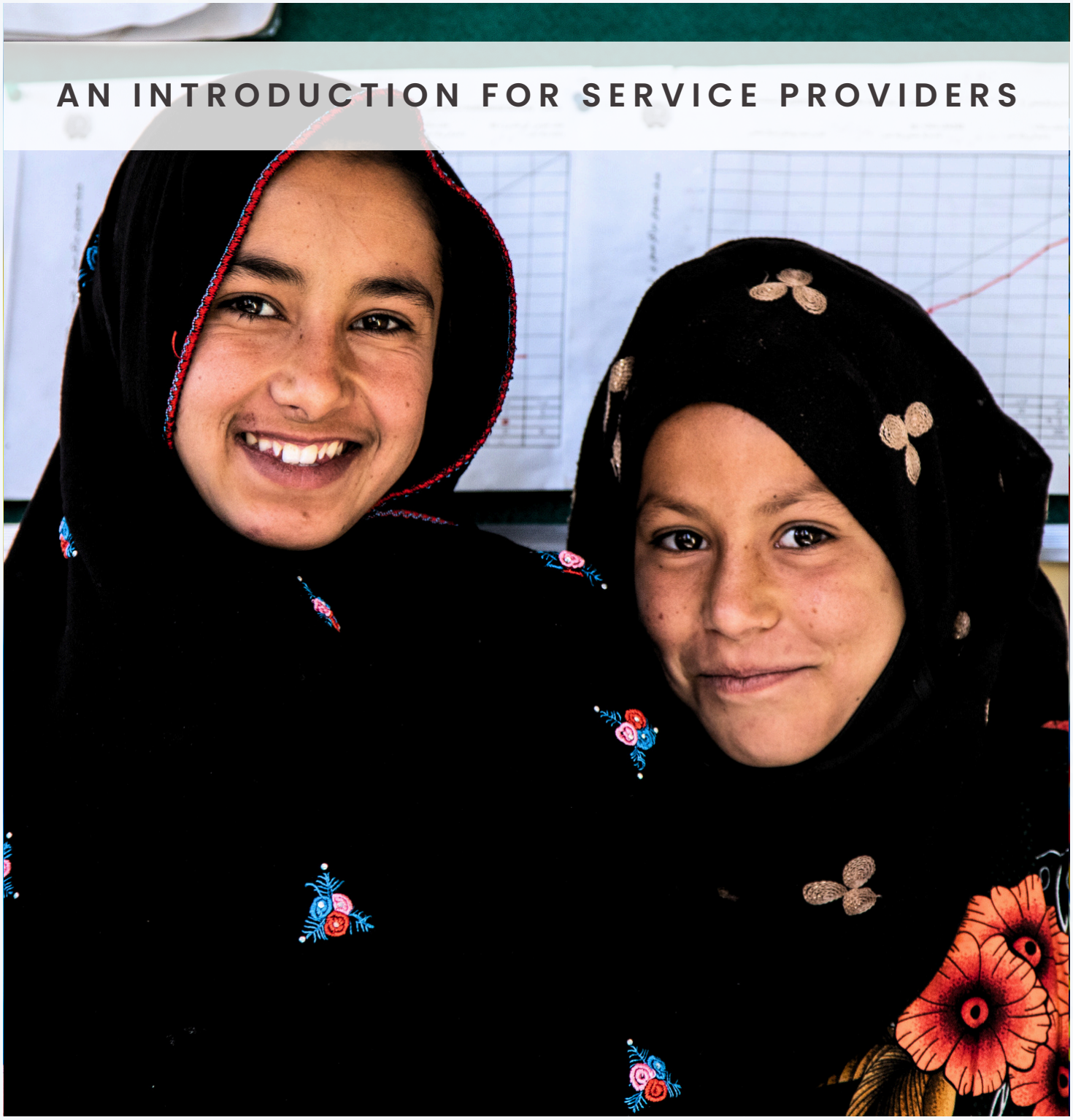
AFGHANS

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 updated for current use.

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PURPOSE OF THIS BACKGROUNDER

This backgrounder contains historical, political, and cultural information to cultivate a general understanding of Afghans arriving in the U.S. 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. 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, but not limited to, scholarly books, articles, reports, and websites of trusted research organizations. See the Bibliography for a list of resources and information about the authors.

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

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

In the 20th century, the intervention of two imperialist powers – the British Empire and Czarist Russia – aggravated Afghanistan's internal affairs. After a series of Anglo-Afghan wars, spanning from 1838 to 1919, Afghanistan regained independence from the United Kingdom and experienced a period of stability, peace, and security. Afghans who entered the U.S. during this time mainly were government employees or students, typically wealthy, well-educated, and from Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan.

In 1978, the Soviet Union invasion launched the nation into an era of turmoil and civil war. In the United States, the invasion stranded many Afghans, requiring individuals to seek asylum. After 1979, additional Afghan immigrants resettled to the U.S. primarily through family reunification programming. Following persistent pressure from the international community and anti-Communist freedom fighters (the Mujahideen), Soviet troops left Afghanistan in 1989. The Mujahideen groups included mostly Afghans, but some fighters from other Islamic countries also fought along their side.

In 1992, the Soviet-backed government collapsed, creating a power vacuum that led to another civil war, which ended when the Taliban extremist group claimed control over the country in 1996. The Taliban imposed a rigid variation of Islam on the country, including repressive social structures. The Taliban also harbored Osama bin Laden, credited with leading the terrorist organization Al Qaeda and organizing the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington, D.C.

After the Soviet troop withdrawal and the following years, several waves of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers departed the country. While not all Afghans came to the United States, from 1980 to 2000, Afghans residing in the U.S. grew from 4,000 to 45,000.

In response to the September 11 attacks, the U.S., with its European allies, provided combat support to forces led by the Northern Alliance. This paved the way to establishing a provisional government run by Hamid Karzai. During this time, Afghanistan made serious progress in building a stronger country. The September 11 attacks also resulted in the implementation of security measures and other policy changes, which significantly reduced the number of Afghans resettled in the United States. In 2008, this changed when the addition of the Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) program created a path to permanent residence for Afghans who aided the U.S. The number of Afghans in the United States has increased significantly since this period. The Afghan population in the U.S. is estimated between 185,000 to 200,000.

On August 15, 2021, the United States military officially withdrew from Afghanistan. Almost immediately, the Taliban advanced throughout the country and retook the nation's capital. Since then, they have reintroduced strict controls on personal freedoms and have curtailed, if not reversed, the country's 20 years of progress and development. The Taliban's campaign sparked an exodus, prompting the U.S. and other international governments to carry out a rapid evacuation process.

TIMELINE FOR RESETTLEMENT PATHWAYS

In late summer of 2021, the U.S. airlifted more than 100,000 Afghans, evacuating people to military bases in the United States and abroad. These newcomers arrived in the United States primarily under humanitarian parole status. Under the Afghan Placement and Assistance program and a stopgap funding bill signed into law by President Biden, new arrivals temporarily had access to services from resettlement agencies and qualified for other federal benefits.

Parole, a temporary status granted to certain individuals for urgent humanitarian or public interest reasons, does not provide a path to legal immigration status. As such, those paroled were required to work with an immigration lawyer or accredited representative with expertise in humanitarian immigration issues to explore options for pursuing permanent immigration status, such as asylum and special immigrant visas, as well as family-based immigration relief. While most of these newcomers were considered humanitarian parolees, others arrived through the Special Immigrant Visa Program.

The Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program aims to protect Afghans employed by or on behalf of the U.S. government, such as interpreters, non-governmental employees, and other Afghans who worked closely with American forces. Through this program, SIV holders arrive in the U.S. as legal permanent residents eligible to work and access resettlement services.

In August 2021, the Department of State announced the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program Priority 2 Designation for Afghan Nationals. This program is for certain Afghan nationals and their eligible family members who may not be eligible for a Special Immigrant Visa but may be at risk due to their affiliation with the U.S. As of May 2025, approximately 200,000 Afghans have arrived in the U.S. through USRAP, SIV program, and Humanitarian Parole.

CONDITIONS IN FIRST-ASYLUM COUNTRIES

Afghans outside their country often face dire circumstances like harsh weather, food shortages, and unsanitary living conditions. They are also not necessarily treated equally under the law in the host communities. For example, they are not able to work in the formal sector, buy property, or access adequate healthcare.

Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran continue to receive most Afghan refugees. According to the UNHCR, there are currently 1,434,025 registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan and 805,040 recognized Afghan refugee cardholders in Iran. It is difficult to determine precisely how many undocumented refugees and asylum seekers are in both countries, but the figures tend to range from anywhere between one to two million.

Ultimately, the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees remains the basis for defining whom a refugee is and ensuring countries remain committed to refugee protection and asylum. Iran is a signatory to the Convention, yet there is limited information on how the country ensures refugee protection. On the other hand, Pakistan does not recognize the Convention and instead offers registered refugees a “Proof of Registration” card providing them with temporary legal status.

GEOGRAPHY

Sharing borders with six countries, Afghanistan is well-positioned geographically as a hub for linking South Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia, and China. A landlocked country covering 251,900 square miles, Afghanistan is equivalent in size to the state of Texas. Afghanistan's longest border is in the east with Pakistan (1,400 miles), while to the west, it shares 572 miles with Iran. In the north, it shares borders with Tajikistan (843 miles), Turkmenistan (500 miles), Uzbekistan (89 miles), and China (47 miles).

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 Knot 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 suffered from drought in recent years, hindering agricultural production and threatening the livelihoods of nearly nine million people.

ETHNIC GROUPS AND INTERETHNIC CONSIDERATIONS

Afghanistan is a diverse country. There are more than 19 different ethnic groups that each have distinct histories and rich cultures. Ethnic affiliation can be a significant organizing principle in parts of rural Afghan society.

Pashtuns and Tajiks represent the ethnic majorities in Afghanistan. The language of the Pashtuns is Pashto, but like most Persian words, the language's name has many spelling variations in English. Traditionally, the Pashtuns were small farmers and semi-nomads with flocks of sheep, goats, and camels. The Tajiks are an influential ethnic group that speak Dari, a dialect of Afghan Persian. A second Dari-speaking group, the Hazaras, are Mongolian descendants that were traditional nomads. Other Dari-speaking groups include the Uzbek, Turkmen, Aimaq, and Beluchi.

Interethnic conflict in Afghanistan and the Afghan diaspora exists. This conflict is due to political, economic, sectarian, and religious affiliations. However, tension among certain groups such as Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks escalated following the 1979 Soviet invasion. During this period, the mujahideen, the Anti-Soviet Resistance, was composed of fighters from various ethnic groups in Afghanistan. While the resistance frequently split along ethnic lines, the war against the Soviet Union initially facilitated interethnic cooperation and national consciousness among the fighters. Two main factors led to a breakdown in their social solidarity.

Essentially, the Soviet-backed government restructured the country politically and socially, thus altering group boundaries. Further, the international community varied in its goals and methods in which they distributed their support. For example, the Islamic regime of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran offered aid almost exclusively to the Shi'ite factions of the mujahideen. Iran refrained from providing any substantial support to the largest faction of the mujahideen, which primarily consisted of ethnic Pashtuns and Tajiks. These ethnic tensions were maintained even after the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan.

With the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021, the tension and rivalry between the Taliban, whose majority members are Pashtun, and non-Pashtun ethnic groups have intensified. In 2021, the Taliban refrained from committing overt ethnically targeted attacks; however, ethnic and religious minorities are often the victims of violence by the militant group.

These interethnic tensions do not disappear upon leaving Afghanistan, but they differ. Ethnic tensions in the United States are rarely physically violent. Instead, these ethnic tensions influence how Afghans form ethnic communities and enforce boundaries between one another. These boundaries can be harmless, with Afghan newcomers feeling more comfortable with co-ethnics based on a shared language and culture. They can also be harmful in fostering ongoing discrimination amongst different ethnic backgrounds, including in some cases between clients, resettlement staff, and interpreters.

LANGUAGE

According to the language factsheet by the Words of Relief published by Save the Children, there are 35 languages spoken in Afghanistan. Dari and Pashto are the two primary languages spoken. Pashto and Dari languages belong to the Indo-European group of languages, and they share common features with the Aryan languages.

In 1964, the Afghan government officially changed the language name from Farsi to Dari. Although, Afghans continue to use the words interchangeably to refer to their native language. Hence, in Afghanistan, Farsi means Dari and should not be mistaken with the Persian dialect spoken in Iran (Iranian Persian). Dari is spoken predominantly in northern, western, and central Afghanistan. The Dari dialects spoken in Afghanistan are Shamaly, Herati Dari, Kabuli Dari, and Khorasani Dari.

Pashto, also referred to as Pakhto, is spoken by 12 million in Afghanistan. The two main Pashto dialects are from northeastern and southern Afghanistan. The northeastern dialect is known as the Yousafzai or Peshawari dialect. The southern dialect is known as the Qandahari Khattak.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

Role of Family

Family is considered the most critical institution in Afghan society. A typical household consists of immediate and extended family members, where parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles share child-raising responsibilities. Each family member recognizes their role and responsibility for the welfare of their family. Children 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 must consult with their elders (i.e., grandparents, parents, elder siblings) before making a decision or commitment. Afghan society is also patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal. Men are responsible for providing for the family and usually have authority over their female family members.

Marriage
Afghans prefer to build relationships through marriage with families that they know well. Afghans also prefer to marry their sons to females from the same sociocultural level that share the same religion, ethnicity, and in some cases, level of education. Women traditionally move to their husband's home to live with their in-laws after marriage and informally participate in intra-family decisions about the marriage of their children.

Polygamy is legal in Afghanistan. A man can have up to four wives. However, specific rules and criteria limit a man's ability to afford more than one wife. For instance, by order of Islam, a man should treat all his wives equally emotionally and financially.

Divorce is traditionally and religiously allowed. However, it is viewed negatively in Afghan society. A divorcée is looked down upon by society. Other factors further exacerbate the ability for women to leave or divorce partners. For example, women are usually not well-positioned in society to have financial independence and will not be accepted back by their own family if they divorce. There is an expectation that women endure and honor their families.

Women and Society
Treatment of women in Afghan society has been closely tied to history and influenced by civil wars and highly conservative religious ideology. For example, during the Soviet Union occupation, there were efforts to expand women's access to education and employment. However, these efforts often face intense backlash from religious and tribal leaders. Under Taliban rule, in particular, women are afraid to partake in the public sphere, even in urban cities.

Domestic abuse is also widespread in Afghanistan. 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 extreme violence and intra-household abuse. According to UNICEF, three-fourths of Afghanistan's children between two and 14 report violent discipline at home. More than a third of boys and a quarter of girls are involved in child labor. Female children face the risk of early marriages, honor killings, and sexual violence. While male children might also face the same risks, they are more often at higher risk for early military recruitment and child labor.

Religion
Islam is the principal religion of Afghanistan. Eighty percent of Afghans are Sunni Muslims, and approximately 19 percent of the population identify as Shia Muslims. There are also communities of other faiths, including Sikhs, Hindus, and Bahai. However, non-Muslims have significantly decreased due to oppression and sectarian conflicts in recent years (less than 1 percent).

Islam shapes an Afghan's identity and guides their day-to-day practices. However, people vary in how they practice their religion. Some people are more rigorous, praying five times a day, strictly maintaining hijab (women covering head to toes), and refraining from eating haram (non-permissible) food items. However, others are more relaxed, praying less frequently and dressing less conservatively. The Taliban insurgent group (the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) has reimposed a fanatical and rigid variation of Islam in Afghanistan.

Although the Afghan constitution (as of 2021) secures the freedom of religion, many Afghans refrain from disagreeing on religious matters or expressing non-traditional views openly in public because it may show contempt or lack of reverence towards Islam. Blasphemy is a serious offense, and offenders face severe punishment.

Diet in Islam
Islam forbids its followers from consuming alcohol, pork and its byproducts, and animals slaughtered improperly or by non-Muslims. Permissible foods are called halal and impermissible foods are called haram. Nevertheless, some Afghan Muslims strictly practice halal and haram foods, while others are more relaxed in their practice.

Ramadan
Ramadan is a holy month in the Islamic culture. This month occurs in the ninth month of the lunar/Islamic calendar. Since Afghans follow the solar calendar, the month of Ramadan happens eleven days earlier each year in Afghanistan. Practicing-Muslims fast throughout the day. Taking or consuming food, fruits, liquids, or tobacco is prohibited during fasting. It is also not ideal to schedule doctor appointments during this time, as injections or vaccinations are also not permitted. Children under 18 and pregnant or breastfeeding women are exempt from fasting. Women are also exempt during their menstruation cycle, although they are required to make up those days after Ramadan. At dusk, Muslims break their fast by having a variety of dishes (to the extent possible). The preferred way to eat or break their fast is in congregations. Ramadan is followed by Eid Ul-Fitr, a three-day holiday marking the successful completion of Ramadan. Two months after Eid Ul-Fitr, there is also the Eid Ul-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice, also known as Eid of Pilgrimage.

Did you know? March 21st is Afghan New Year's, also called Nowruz.

TIPS

In a non-Muslim country, Afghan families should read the ingredients of food items. They should also ask questions when buying meat to ensure it is halal or haram. If Afghans are invited for food by non-Muslims, the host, to the extent possible, should prepare halal food and provide some vegetarian options. It is also a good practice to inform Afghan guests about the ingredients used in a dish before consuming it. Popular Afghan dishes include different rice dishes such as palaw, chalaw, and qabilee-palow. Finally, eating or drinking in front of a Muslim who fasts may be viewed as inappropriate.

SERVICE DELIVERY AND COMMUNITY ORIENTATION

The following sections contain detailed and contextualized information about working with Afghans while navigating different community orientation topics and service provision. As noted previously, RAs and other local service providers should adjust this information based on specific cases and needs.

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

For Afghans, aspects of life in the U.S. may be new and present challenges in their cultural adjustment. Possible challenges may include stressors associated with encountering Islamophobia or xenophobia or changing dynamics in family life.

In some Afghan communities, men expect their wives to stay home and continue to do their job as they did back before. On the other hand, some women want to exercise their rights, enjoy their freedom, and participate actively in society, creating confusion and tension.

Furthermore, Afghan refugees may have never interacted with people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds other than those from their own country. As such, they may not know how to engage in a culturally sensitive and politically correct manner. To ease their culture shock and ensure they receive the necessary support to integrate into the host community properly, consider the following:

- Be aware of the history of Afghanistan, the current events that led to their displacement, and their basic values and cultural practices.
- Build trust and create an open dialogue around possible challenges related to differences in social and family life in the United States. To do this, use active listening and give space for Afghans to share their perspectives.
- Create an inclusive environment using open-ended questions and scenarios that allow both men and women to participate and see the value of changes in family dynamics.
- Practice patience and be mindful of different communication styles. It will take some time before Afghans feel comfortable in their new environment and acclimate to the norms and customs of the United States.
- Promote a positive learning environment during their initial stage of resettlement. Ensure that Afghan refugees feel comfortable asking questions and participating in cultural adjustment-specific activities.
- Include orientation sessions that invite Afghans to reflect on their cultural identities, personal experiences, and perceptions of life in the U.S. These sessions should provide a respectful and open environment where participants can explore themes such as belonging, adaptation, and mutual understanding without fear of judgment.

EDUCATION

The education system in Afghanistan has had its ups and downs. Most Afghans, especially in rural and tribal areas, are illiterate and lack basic reading and writing skills. In addition, the quality of teaching and learning is low; the percentage of professionally trained teachers is 10-15%. Furthermore, not all Afghans have learned from the same curriculum. Millions of Afghans repatriated from Iran and Pakistan during 2001-2021. They continued their education alongside those Afghans who had never immigrated outside of the country. Additionally, private institutions implement curricula used in foreign countries.

In general, classes are highly teacher-centered, emphasizing rote memorization. The curriculum, highly influenced by Islam, gives fewer opportunities to students to question issues using inquiry-based learning. Additionally, parent engagement is uncommon in Afghanistan. Afghan parents believe that schools and teachers know what is best for their children. Thus, they do not question school administration or teachers' decisions about their children's education.

Finally, some children may have experienced the struggle to survive and may show evidence of post-traumatic stress. Therefore, they need 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 tips:

- Orient parents around expectations for supporting their children at school.
- Build trust through different touchpoints, such as one-on-one meetings and community orientation sessions to reinforce messaging on the U.S. education system and roles and responsibilities of parents.
- 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.
- Conduct outreach with schools and teachers or other community partners to foster increased understanding and identify ongoing needs and solutions for Afghan families and their children.
- Prepare to answer questions about higher education and discuss the need to balance work with educational goals.
- Facilitate connections with relevant community-based education programs beyond those designed to teach English, such as literacy and digital literacy programs or programs that assist with obtaining General Educational Development (GED) diploma for older youth.

EMPLOYMENT

Afghans enter the United States with varying skills and work experience, from holding government positions to non-formal work experience inside the home. There are two types of jobs in Afghan culture: high and low prestige.

High prestigious jobs include being a teacher, professor, engineer, physician, lawyer, or high-ranking government employee. Low-prestigious jobs include working as a cook, porter, musician, singer, dancer, or barber. The mindset that stigma is attached to specific jobs and expectations of obtaining jobs aligned with their experience may pose challenges in accepting the first available job.

In addition, some Afghan newcomers may not want to work in places that serve alcohol or pork due to their Islamic beliefs. Formal employment experience will also vary by gender. In addressing some of these challenges, consider the following tips:

- Listen to the individual carefully and learn about their experience, qualifications, and goals. Acknowledge the individual's work experience and qualifications and explain how the job market works in the United States without discouraging them.

- Develop a comprehensive individual employment plan (IEP) for short- and long-term employment. The short-term IEP should focus on the individual's financial self-sufficiency, and the long-term IEP should concentrate on the individual's goals and objectives for later in life.

- Use a strengths-based approach and discuss what skills individuals may have that are transferable to a job in the U.S. However, also set clear goals, expectations, and timelines, including identifying the types of jobs and planning to address barriers to employment (e.g., childcare, transportation, and language).

- Facilitate an open and honest dialogue on traditional gender roles in the context of employment and emphasize the need for all employable adults to work to achieve self-sufficiency. The creation of and reference to a service plan and budget will assist in understanding the importance for all employable adults to work to achieve self-sufficiency.

- Identify jobs that Afghans, especially women, feel comfortable doing. As Muslims, Afghan women may not want to work in an environment where they interact with a majority male workforce. Be sure to consider working hours and the distance between home and work. When possible, avoid night shifts and locations that require extended travel alone.

- Discuss with individuals their workplace rights, especially related to religious practices.

- As relevant, emphasize the need for continuing English Language Learning even after obtaining employment to gain the skills needed for job upgrades. It is also vital that individuals know work ethics and the significance of building a good work history.

HEALTH

Poverty and lack of access to an adequate health care system and medical services in Afghanistan have harmed preventative care for many Afghans. In most cases, Afghans visit medical facilities only when they have pain and may not be aware of their overall physical fitness. When accessing health services, many Afghans may prefer to be seen by physicians of the same gender. They will not feel comfortable sharing their medical problems with the opposite gender, including interpreters.

Specific topics may create discomfort or are considered taboo to Afghans. For example, discussing sexual habits and relations can create embarrassment, and seeking mental health services may be perceived as shameful. At the same time, the resettlement process from flight to post-migration may result in depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder. In response to these health concerns, consider the following tips:

- Educate individuals on what they might encounter as they seek out healthcare options, including the possibility that they might not receive treatment from someone of the same ethnicity or culture as themselves. However, individuals should have a health provider of the same gender when possible. When this is not feasible, ensure that care providers are made aware of the individual's cultural and religious background.

- Given the lack of familiarity with health services in the U.S., be prepared to provide Afghan families with more support in understanding the complex U.S. healthcare system. Some service providers have used healthcare navigators or volunteers to accompany Afghan newcomers to appointments or the pharmacy and assist in understanding health insurance and medical bills.

- Demystify and destigmatize mental health services when discussing health and cultural adjustment. For example, asking interpreters to replace the term "mental health" with "emotional health" or "services to address emotional well-being" and replacing "therapy" with "counseling" may also be helpful. Partnering with a local mental health service provider could assist with training service providers on destigmatizing mental health and linking Afghan clients to needed services.

- Utilize a variety of community partnerships to address health concerns, including requesting a guest speaker from a local service provider to assist in destigmatizing mental health services. Another critical source of support for emotional well-being is local faith leaders within the Afghan community. When possible, service providers should build strong relationships with and train leaders of the Afghan community on the importance of accessing mental health services. This relationship can assist reluctant clients to access mental health services and destigmatize the access of those services in the Afghan community.

- Discuss health concerns, including mental health, with Afghan clients early in the resettlement period. The misunderstanding of and lack of education on mental health has led newly arrived Afghan clients to inaccurately complete mental health screenings as they are unfamiliar with the signs of mental health distress. By providing education on mental health early in the resettlement period, clients may be more willing to open about their issues and ensure referral to appropriate services.

HOUSING

Afghan families may prefer to live alone but closer to their extended families or in a community where they can interact with other Afghans or Muslims. They may feel more comfortable around people who share similar language, beliefs, and traditions. Living in such communities may help families avoid feelings of isolation.

Many new arrivals may have high expectations for their new living situations and may hope for a larger home, not an apartment. However, due to financial constraints, families may have no other option. Additionally, most households in Afghanistan are multi-generational and composed of both immediate and extended family members.

Finally, Afghans may be reluctant to use previously used items, such as furniture, because it may reflect a loss of status; or feel the used materials are unclean. To help Afghans adjust to their new homes and community, consider the following tips:

- Discuss household maintenance, including clearly outlining which upkeep and repair responsibilities belong to the occupant and which fall to the landlord.
- Practice or demonstrate the use of appliances and utilities that may be new to individuals, such as using gas stoves. Plumbing and drainage systems in the United States are also different, so review steps to avoid clogging toilets or kitchen sinks.
- Review tenant rights and responsibilities and the concept of a lease based on the U.S. context, including the importance of background checks, security deposits, and establishing positive rental history.
- Include community guests from banks or other trusted financial institutions to discuss pathways to homeownership and help Afghans identify realistic goals and timelines.

RESETTLEMENT SERVICES

Afghan refugees may have misconceptions about the U.S. resettlement process and its refugee-specific forms of assistance. These expectations may rely on the United States' stereotypes in films, books, and social media outlets. They might expect items like a house and a car and not struggle in the way they did in Afghanistan. To reconcile their expectations with the realities of resettlement, service providers should consider the following tips when engaging with Afghans:

- Facilitate an open and honest conversation regarding the role of resettlement agencies, including what services exist or do not exist as a part of initial resettlement.
- Emphasize that while resettlement agencies will support them in their transition, they must also consider that their integration into the host community will rely heavily on their participation and initiative.
- When possible and relevant, refer Afghan refugees to Afghan-led community organizations. These organizations will provide them with a network of individuals that could assist them with finding work, facilitating their social and cultural integration, and offering them an opportunity to form relationships with other Afghan refugees and Afghan Americans.

U.S. LAWS

Afghanistan's legal system has undergone many changes in the past few decades. While the previous administration did its best to establish a rule of law and a legal system capable of guaranteeing fundamental rights, many of these laws were either not enforced, or courts instead applied Islamic laws rather than the provisions of its constitution. These issues have progressed even further as the Taliban replaced the previous judicial system with its court system that centers on Islamic and customary laws.

Additionally, many of Afghanistan's citizens often refuse to seek help from law enforcement and the courts based on their knowledge of police corruption, inaction, or believing that certain events (e.g., domestic abuse) are familial matters and not for discussion outside of the home.

For instance, many Afghan refugees may not understand traffic laws or the need to procure licenses for particular activities. The U.S. legal system may often be an Afghan's first experience interacting with a formal judicial system. To ease Afghans transitions to U.S. laws and norms, consider the following suggestions:

- Provide a clear explanation of the American legal system, including emphasizing the responsibility for each individual to know the laws. Explain directly that any violations of this law might have legal consequences, such as jail, fines, or deportation, and can negatively impact their immigration status.

- Encourage cooperation between Afghans and law enforcement. Cooperation will take effort on both ends; Afghans must be willing to work with law enforcement, and law enforcement must take the steps necessary to understand their cultural background and way of living. Forging mutual trust and respect is essential. If possible, build partnerships with local law enforcement to participate in community orientation sessions as guest speakers.

- Establish respect and trust. If unsure of an answer related to U.S. laws, be transparent and identify trusted sources or community partners that can assist in finding the answers.

CONCLUSION

With support from service providers, Afghans can mobilize their inherent strengths and attitudes that will help them successfully resettle in the U.S. As with other refugee populations, Afghans will require service providers to incorporate a variety of approaches into community orientation and throughout service provision to ensure long-term integration. For additional resources on community orientation for newcomers, please visit Settle In. To learn more about delivering culturally responsive services, explore the tools and guidance available at Switchboard.

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Farid Saydee (Ph.D. in Education), immigrated to the United States as an Afghan refugee in July 2000. Before transitioning to academia in 2008, Farid worked for seven years at the International Rescue Committee San Diego office in different capacities, including a resettlement case manager, employment coordinator, and immigration manager.
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