

AFGANISTAN UPDATE

Refugee Resettlement

The initial phase of Afghan refugee resettlement is largely finished. Agencies have resettled about 1,000 refugees in the Triangle and 1,900 in North Carolina, a few hundred more than expected. More refugees will probably be added at a slower rate, since there are still thousands of refugees in temporary housing on military bases or in hotels.

Refugee support is now moving into the second phase: teaching families English, getting kids into school, getting jobs, getting accreditation as doctors, nurses, nursing assistants, etc.; getting drivers licenses, establishing long-term legal status, and all the other mundane and not-so-mundane things that refugees need to do.

The resettlement was accomplished by an extraordinary effort from the refugee resettlement agencies, whose staff had been cut to the bone during the Trump administration. For example, Church World Service resettled 20 refugees in North Carolina in 2020. In the 6-month period from September 2021-February 2022, they resettled 225 Afghans. 28 out of 32 staff members were new to their positions since 2020.

Challenges

- Continued support. Some refugees settle in quickly and need little support. Others need extensive continued help with English language learning, child care, job searches, financial support during times when a family member needs to quit working in order to gain accreditation for better jobs. With the number of new refugees, this is a major stress on agencies.
- Legal status. The Afghans are not actually “refugees” under U.S. law. They are “humanitarian parolees” for two years. If they are not granted asylum or refugee status within two years, they become “illegal aliens” subject to deportation. Congress could extend parolee status or grant them refugee status as a group, but this does not look likely. Otherwise, each family will need to establish their own asylum claims with the help of immigration lawyers. This is a difficult, lengthy, and expensive process that the refugee agencies have not had to do before on such a massive scale. Since many families had to flee at the last minute, many of them lack needed documentation, and the U.S. legal system is not kind to such “delinquents.”
- The Ukraine War. The war has driven off any attention that the Biden administration or Congress had for Afghan refugees and any media coverage of the difficulties that they face in resettlement and gaining continued legal status. The U.S. commitment to admit 100,000 Ukraine refugees threatens to overwhelm the refugee agencies. They managed the influx of Afghan refugees with a six-month “sprint” that has left them exhausted, both physically and financially. They can’t repeat that sprint, but they are concerned that their success will make the Biden administration think that they can.

Opportunities to Support Afghan Refugees

- *Become a CARE project team member.* Church World Service organizes CARE Projects ([CARE Groups | CWS Durham \(cwsrdu.org\)](https://www.cwsrdu.org)) as part of its second phase of resettlement. A CARE Project supports a single family for a limited period of time for a specific project. For example, the family wage-earner may need to take a community college certificate program to qualify for better paying jobs. A CARE project team is a group of 5-12 people who will make a financial and time commitment for a project that may last 1-4 months. A team member can make either a time commitment, a financial commitment, or both to the project. Joe Groves is working with both the Church of Reconciliation and Carol Woods to see if we have the leadership and resources to form a team. *If you are interested in exploring being a team member, contact Joe Groves at jgroves210@comcast.net.*
- *Food-stocking for new refugees.* When Church World Service learns that a new refugee family is arriving (which may be only 24-48 hours notice), they need a Food-stocking team to buy a list of food staples and place it in the apartment for them. If you would like to organize or be part of a food-stocking team, fill out a CWS application form ([CWS Durham Volunteer Application \(jotform.com\)](https://www.jotform.com)) and they will contact you.
- *Become a conversation partner.* You can become an English conversation partner with a refugee partner over Zoom. If you have ESL training or experience, you can be particularly helpful, but anyone can help with basic conversational skills. You can apply here ([CWS Durham Volunteer Application \(jotform.com\)](https://www.jotform.com)).
- *Make a contribution.* There are several agencies working on refugee resettlement in the Triangle. Church World Service is church-based but non-sectarian and does careful and culturally sensitive resettlement work. You can contribute at [Refugee Resettlement | CWS Durham \(cwsrdu.org\)](https://www.cwsrdu.org).

NOTE: Follow up from CWS can be slow. Let Joe Groves know if you are getting a response from them (jgroves210@comcast.net).