

How State and Local Legislators and Governors Can Support Afghan Refugees and Allies

August 2021

Background: As the Taliban consolidates control over the Afghan capital of Kabul, it is clear that immediate action is needed to evacuate Afghan allies who served with U.S. forces and international civil society and to urgently expand access to the U.S. resettlement program to provide refuge for Afghans fleeing violence and persecution. With American diplomats and the remaining U.S. military presence positioned to leave the capital within days, vulnerable Afghans must not be left behind. The United States has a moral responsibility to offer refuge to its allies, their families, and others at risk of persecution. More information about the displacement crisis in Afghanistan is [available here](#).

The administration must urgently evacuate all Afghan allies, and their loved ones, who assisted the U.S. mission in Afghanistan to U.S. territory. Although nearly 1,200 Afghans have arrived at Fort Lee, Virginia, and have begun their resettlement process, this figure represents around 1% of the total number of allies who need to be evacuated. If evacuation flights continue at their current pace, it would take until March 2023 to evacuate all eligible Afghans out of the country. It is vital that **all of our Afghan allies** (18,000 plus about 53,000 family members) be flown to U.S. territory and have their immigration applications expeditiously completed as well.

It is equally important that the administration simultaneously expands and expedites life-saving refugee protections for Afghans fleeing violence and persecution. The administration should immediately increase "Priority 1" referrals of Afghan refugees to USRAP, implement the "Priority 2" direct access program for groups of Afghans of special humanitarian concern to the United States (with both in-country and third-country processing) which was [announced](#) on August 2nd, and surge adjudication and processing resources to assist these refugees. These pathways should include, at minimum, family members of U.S. government employees, U.S. government employees not covered by the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program, and other at-risk populations such as activists, journalists, religious and ethnic minorities, and humanitarian workers. Particularly for women who are targets, the path to protection, even under Priority 2 designation, is often inaccessible. Women leaders, former members of government, human rights defenders, activists, students, and recent graduates must also be prioritized in evacuation efforts.

Here are the top 4 ways to take action:

- 1. Send a Letter:** Hold the Biden administration accountable by sending a letter to the White House. You can copy/adapt [this template letter](#) for state and local officials or governors. You could also consider sending a letter in coordination with other policymakers/legislators from your state.
- 2. Invest Resources:** Strengthen your state's community response to welcome Afghan refugees and special immigrant visa holders by [allocating state](#) and local funds for refugee resettlement service providers. It is more important than ever to invest in community-based integration services for new arrivals. States across the country, like [Oregon](#), Iowa, New York, and Vermont, have already committed state dollars for refugee services through the regular state appropriations process or using federal COVID relief funds.
- 3. Issue Public Statements:** Demonstrate that your state and locality welcomes Afghan refugees and allies by sharing press statements, issuing proclamations, and/or introducing welcome resolutions (if your legislature is in session). Feel free to use/adapt [RCUSA's press statement from August 16th](#), [this digital toolkit](#), [this messaging guidance](#), [this social media guide](#), or [this rapid response toolkit](#) for sample social media posts, graphics, talking points, and more.
- 4. Support the U.S. Resettlement Program:** State and local policymakers are invited to [sign this letter](#) urging the administration to issue a refugee admissions goal of 125,000 for FY 2022. The form is open to signatures until September 9th, and the landing page will be periodically updated to reflect new signatories. Reach out to outreach@refugeeadvocacylab.org with any questions.

Guidance for how to help displaced Afghans outside the United States:

- IRAP: [Resources on How to Help Afghan Partners](#)
- Afghan American Foundation: [Afghanistan Emergency IDP Fundraising Organizations August 2021](#)
- GIWPS: [How to Save the Lives of Afghan Women](#)
- Women's Regional Network: [Women Globally Working to Protect Afghan Women](#)
- Vital Voice Emergency Fund: Contact Saba Ghori at sabaghor@vitalvoices.org
- Open Society Foundations: [Open Society Announces a \\$10 Million Emergency Fund for Afghan Civilians in Peril](#)

Thank you for your work, and please share this one-pager with your state and local contacts!

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