



St Vincent
de Paul Society

England and Wales

Turning Concern into Action

SVP – Fact Sheet for supporting Afghan refugees

Welcoming the stranger: our responsibility to help Afghan refugees

After more than four decades of displacement, Afghan refugees constitute one of the largest [protracted refugee situations](#) in the world. As of today, there are an estimated 6 million Afghans who have been forcibly displaced from their homes.

Jesus identifies Himself as a stranger to be welcomed (Matthew 25:35), and Pope Francis has spoken many times about the importance of helping and welcoming migrants and refugees.

The Catholic Church teaches that all people have the right to live a dignified life in their homeland. Tragically, over 48 million people around the world are displaced. War, natural calamities, persecution and discrimination of every kind have deprived millions of their home, employment, family and homeland. It is our responsibility to welcome the stranger and support those in need.

This toolkit is intended to provide practical guidance to SVP members and conferences who want to support people experiencing the Afghan crisis. This is a complex crisis with no silver bullet that can solve it. We can begin however to put our concern into action as Vincentians by educating ourselves about the issue and taking steps to welcome and support those affected by it.

This is also a call to practice the values taught by Catholic Social Teaching, and practice social justice by advocating for the most vulnerable.

What is the current situation in Afghanistan?

After more than four decades of displacement, Afghan refugees constitute one of the largest [protracted refugee situations](#) in the world. There are nearly 6 million Afghans who have been forcibly displaced from their homes (UNHCR).

Afghan people have suffered more than 40 years of conflict, chronic poverty, food insecurity, in addition to the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Violence in Afghanistan is worsening in intensity and spreading in reach, causing even more human suffering and displacement. This situation has been exacerbated by the recent takeover of the Taliban.

The United High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that in addition to the 600,000 displaced in 2021, there were already 3 million internally displaced Afghans



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at the end of 2020. Today, nearly 6 million Afghans have been driven out of their homes and their country by conflict, violence and poverty.

An estimated 600,000 Afghans have been newly displaced inside the country since January 2021. Women and girls have been particularly affected by the conflict, with the UNHCR estimating that 80 percent of newly displaced Afghans are women and children.

The needs of Afghans are extremely urgent, with high demand for shelter, food, water, non-food items, health services, livelihood opportunities and cash assistance.

Learn about the difference between migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

We have put together a useful guide on terminology, [read it here](#).

What is the UK doing to help Afghan refugees?

As a response to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, the UK Government has set up two schemes to resettle Afghan people in the UK. These have broadly the same aim, to provide protection for Afghans at risk, but have different eligibility criteria.

Resettlement is the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another state like the United Kingdom. Resettlement schemes are partnership between Governments and the UNHCR to resettle a number of people to host countries where they can find safety and rebuild their lives.

The UK Government set up two schemes to resettle Afghans in the UK: Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and The Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme (ACRS).

The ARAP is a scheme launched on 1 April 2021 to provide support for Afghans who worked closely with the British military and UK government in Afghanistan, while the ACRS will provide protection for Afghan people at risk. The government has committed to welcome around 5,000 people in the first year (2021) and up to 20,000 over the coming years.

We have produced a fact sheet on these two schemes, [which you can read here](#).



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What can you do to help?

1. **Donate money** to our emergency fund to support our centres and volunteers deliver lifeline support and resources. [Click here to donate.](#)
2. **Write to your Local Authority** asking them to make an offer to resettle families. The Government asked Local Authorities to step forward and offer housing to resettle Afghan refugees. The deadline to offer places is very soon, and we need as many people as possible to let their local council know they are ready to welcome refugees. **Can you write to your local authority today and ask them to commit to resettling refugees in your area?** Follow the steps below:
 - Go to [this](#) website and enter your postcode to find the details of your Local Authority.
 - Select **“write to all your councillors”** (on the right-hand side of the page)
 - Copy and paste the following message in the box or write in your own words how important it is for you to help Afghans in need and ask the council to commit to resettle Afghans in your area.

“My name is [insert your name] and I am a local resident.

I am very concerned about the current situation in Afghanistan and concerned for the people whose life is at risk. I am writing to you to ask to let the Home Office know our council is ready to welcome Afghan refugees through the ARAP and ACRS schemes.

I believe our council should be welcoming refugees and offer hospitality and generosity to those in need.

I am writing to you as your constituent asking you to let the Government know we are ready to welcome refugees in our area.

Thank you”

- Enter your details in the appropriate boxes and send the message.



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3. Long-term advocacy

This will not be the last crisis we will see affecting people displaced and forced to flee their home. Unfortunately, millions of people every day are forced to flee their home or migrate for a number of reasons. While it's important to respond to immediate need, we also need to look at the bigger picture and remember that the crisis faced by Afghan and other refugees doesn't happen in isolation, but needs to be understood in the context of world politics.

We believe that no human being is illegal, and everyone deserved to be helped and welcomed when in need. A just and fair immigration system should be based on compassion, dignity and principles of welcome.

Currently, there is a bill going through parliament which is likely to affect millions of refugees for years to come. The Nationality and Borders Bill (NAB) is a proposed new law. It would overhaul the UK's asylum system so as to make it as difficult as possible to get asylum in the UK. If this bill becomes law, thousands of people forced to flee their homes and in need of safe haven will not be able to find safety and security in the UK. The Bill would deny many refugees the chance to seek sanctuary in the UK, criminalise many of those who try, isolate refugees in harmful out-of-town institutions, and undermine 70 years of international co-operation under the UN refugee convention. It would drastically cut the overall number we give safety to.

We have been working for many months now, together with other faith groups, faith leaders and community organisations to oppose this bill.

We need all the support we can get: can you sign up today to stay informed about our advocacy work on the **bill**?

Commented [AS1]: Monica and Steff: can we have a sign up form on the website? When the campaign resource I'm working on is ready we can email it to people, we just need their email address for now.

ⁱ <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html>