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Introduction

The recent events in Afghanistan have highlighted what was already a serious issue. How well can we welcome those who served our services, diplomats, businesses and charities working in Afghanistan over the past 20 years who no longer felt safe or welcome in their home country?

The ARAP (Afghanistan Relocations and Assistance Policy) launched on April 1st 2021 has now had added to it the Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme. Huge numbers have been brought out of Afghanistan in a very short space of time. Over the coming months, it is anticipated many more will arrive through other routes. The challenge for the whole nation is to welcome these families and help them build new lives here in the United Kingdom.

Alongside this is the reality that for the past few years Afghan citizens have been travelling here seeking asylum. There are thousands already stuck in the asylum system awaiting a response to their claim. How might their claims now be processed more rapidly?

God's call on God's people has always been to welcome the stranger and help provide for them. So here is a fresh opportunity to live out this calling. It has to be very practical; hence this toolkit. It is not a quick short term response that is most needed but a willingness to befriend families and support them for the long haul. It is also a call to stand up for justice and advocate for the most vulnerable.

This pack helps guides us through how we can do this well. Let us pray for God's wisdom, and the compassion of Jesus to fill us. Then in the power of the Holy Spirit let us pray and act.

Rt Revd Paul Butler, Lead Bishop for Refugees and Asylum

This toolkit has been prepared by the Mission and Public Affairs Division of the Church of England and [the Diocese of Canterbury](#). We have been overwhelmed with messages from churches and individuals concerned by the unfolding situation in Afghanistan and asking what they can do to help. We hope that this toolkit will offer some tools to those wishing to navigate the challenging, yet light filling ministry of welcoming the stranger.

Get informed about Afghanistan and refugees

What is the current situation?

Events in Afghanistan are moving extremely quickly and it is difficult to predict what might happen next. Even before the announced pullout of American troops Afghanistan was already one of the world's biggest countries of origin for asylum seekers and displaced people in the world.

The UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) note that 'There are almost 2.5 million registered refugees from Afghanistan. They comprise the largest protracted refugee population in Asia and the second-largest refugee population in the world'.

The vast majority of these have remained in neighbouring states such as Pakistan or are displaced within Afghanistan itself. The situation is particularly serious for women and children, who make up 80% of those who are now displaced.

A great many of those displaced will not be able to leave Afghanistan, and only a very small minority of those displaced will look to come to the UK. That said there are now two resettlement routes for some Afghan refugees to the UK as well as several thousand Afghans who may look to arrive by irregular routes (see below).

Key facts on Afghan refugees arriving in the UK

There are two separate schemes designed to help with the specific situation in Afghanistan. The **ARAP (Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy)** scheme is for around an estimated 5000 Afghans who are current or former locally employed staff (e.g. interpreters, embassy guards) who are assessed to be under serious threat to life and their families. The scheme in its current form has run since April.

- [See the Home Office factsheet for more details.](#)

The **Afghanistan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme** is a new scheme that will welcome 5,000 Afghan citizens in year one, with up to a total of 20,000 in the long term. It is aimed at those most in need who have been forced to flee Afghanistan, including women, girls and children at risk given their particular vulnerability.

- [See the Home Office factsheet for more details.](#)

Every person coming to the UK as part of the resettlement scheme will be subject to the same strict security checks as those resettled through other schemes.

All refugees (i.e. anyone who arrives through either resettlement scheme) have access to mainstream benefits and services, including access to healthcare via the NHS and funding for English for Speakers of Other Languages through the Adult Education Budget (if they are unemployed

and looking for work). They also have immediate and unrestricted access to the labour market and are eligible to receive employment support from the Department for Work and Pensions.

Anyone who arrives through the resettlement schemes will have been subject to security checks and have been granted full refugee status.

However, it should be noted that many more people from Afghanistan will (and indeed already are) be arriving by irregular means (e.g. by boat).

These are classed as **asylum seekers** and need to apply for refugee status. In the year to March 2021, over 3,000 Afghan nationals had asylum claims pending in the UK, over two-thirds of whom have been waiting longer than six months.

Asylum seekers are eligible for some support though it is much more limited than for refugees. This support includes:

- A weekly payment of £39.64 (at the time of writing) is designed to help pay for things like food, clothing and toiletries. The allowance is loaded onto a debit card (ASPEN card) each week
- Accommodation, but with no choice about where this will be
- Basic health and dental care, and free prescriptions
- Children must go to school and may receive free meals.

Under the Nationality and Borders Bill (which is currently being discussed in parliament) it will become a criminal offence to knowingly arrive in the UK illegally without permission to be here. The UK government's position is that people should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach and not risk their lives making dangerous crossings across the Channel. This is an extremely controversial proposal (see the advocacy section below). At the present time, Afghans arriving by irregular means in the UK can still apply for asylum and may require help to do so.

Get Involved: How you can help

Donations and drop off points

There are many brilliant charities and organisations that have a long history of working with refugees. A good first point of call is to look at some of the emergency appeals for your area.

Organisation	Location	Links
Care for Calais	Nationwide Map	https://care4calais.org/thedropoffmap/
UNHCR	Nationwide Appeal	https://www.unrefugees.org.uk/where-help-is-needed/afghanistan-situat
Carriers of Hope	Coventry	https://carriersofhope.org.uk/donate-goods/
Caritas	Diocese of Salford	https://www.caritassalford.org.uk/afghanistan-appeal-2021/
UNICEF	Nationwide Appeal	https://www.unicef.ie/donate/afghanistan/
Canterbury Welcomes Refugees	Canterbury	https://www.canterbury-refugees.com/donate
Save the Children	Nationwide	https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/where-we-work/asia/afghanistan
The British Red Cross	Nationwide Afghan Appeal	https://donate.redcross.org.uk/appeal/afghanistan-crisis-appeal
The Salvation Army	Nationwide Map	https://www.salvationarmytrading.org.uk/banks/finder
Welcome Churches	Nationwide Appeal	https://welcomechurches.org/updates/emergency-afghan-fund/
Choose Love	Nationwide Appeal	https://donate.chooselove.org/campaigns/urgent-fundraiser-support-afg
Paiwand	Emergency Fund /London	https://www.paiwand.com/
Liverpool City Council	Liverpool	https://liverpool.gov.uk/adult-social-care/our-liverpool-refugees-people-s
Bristol City Council	Bristol	https://www.bristol.gov.uk/housing-for-business-and-professionals/afgha
Wales Refugee Council	Wales	https://wrc.wales/
Migration Yorkshire	Yorkshire	https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/?page=supporting-afghan-people

Refuwegee	Scotland	https://www.refuweege.co.uk/your-donations
The Refugee Council	Nationwide Tool and Appeal	https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/support-and-information-for-people-a
Kent Refugee Action Network	Canterbury/ Mental Health Support	https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/mental-health-support-for-young-refuge
Diocese of Canterbury	Kent Refugee Projects	https://givealittle.co/campaigns/596d7805-218e-41fc-bbb9-54e4559e92b
Caritas Salford	Greater Manchester	https://www.caritassalford.org.uk/afghanistan-appeal-2021/
Afghan Welcome	Nationwide	https://www.afghanwelcome.org/support
Chelmsford Diocese appeal	Chelmsford diocese	https://www.totalgiving.co.uk/appeal/Afghan

Longer term practical help

This is not going to be a short-term crisis. The Afghanistan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme will run for several years before it meets its target of 20,000 resettled refugees. Every refugee who arrives in the UK will have experienced some form of trauma and many will require long-term support of some sort. Whether in terms of housing, education, or just making friends and being included in society there are many forms of help that can be offered by churches and local groups.

Some ways in which you and your church can engage in this work are:

- [Join the Welcome Churches network](#) to provide a warm welcome for refugees looking for a community. Send trained volunteers to deliver a box filled with small gifts and local information to refugees who have recently arrived in your area and give a warm welcome to them over the first few months of their arrival.
- Could your church get involved in Community Sponsorship? Community Sponsorship is a shared endeavour. Individuals who may or may not already know each other form a group and work together to prepare for and welcome a refugee family to their local area. When communities lead the welcome, refugees have the benefit of a local support network right from day one.
- The group supports the family through their first year in the UK to live independent lives, learn English, and access schools, benefits, healthcare and employment and participate fully in the community. These groups receive training and support from Reset (the national Community Sponsorship learning hub) through every stage of their journey and are also supported by their Lead Sponsor, who takes legal responsibility for the project.

The Church of England has two national representatives who can advise parishes on becoming community sponsors. Please contact [Domenica Pecoraro](#) or [Gareth Jones](#) if you would like more information about how to get involved further.

Advocate

There are many things we can do ourselves by getting alongside refugees. We know, however, that the challenges and injustices faced by refugees are bigger than what we can always confront locally. Some issues are innately international or linked to broader political and structural challenges. Seeking justice for refugees can also involve using our voice to convince politicians of the need for policies and actions that reflect a commitment to compassion and human dignity. Advocacy is taking up the call to “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.” (Proverbs 31:8-9).

The Church of England, through its national institutions and through the Lords Spiritual (the bishops who sit in the House of Lords) have a long history of engagement in the political process. However, we would always encourage every Christian concerned about refugee policy to seek ways of becoming involved.

We would encourage Christians concerned by the situation to write to their MPs or to consider joining with [the Together With Refugees coalition](#) that includes many prominent faith and charity groups within the refugee sector. Many of these groups have long experience responding to political challenges, including the Nationality and Borders Bill which is currently before parliament.

Some of the areas you may wish to raise include:

Advocacy for the Afghan situation

- We are grateful that the government has opened the two resettlement routes for Afghans. However, we also hope to see that this provision will be as generous as possible, and not be capped arbitrarily in a way that would deny family reunion or additional vulnerable people from coming here. The UK government’s offer of 5000 places for this year represents only a tiny fraction of those seeking refuge and is far smaller than the equivalent promises made by Canada.
- There is a great deal of enthusiasm and willingness among faith groups to support the work of resettlement, but it will need to be done with Local Authorities. We want to encourage all Local Authorities to play their part in committing to receive Afghan refugees and to work alongside them as willing partners.

This is a crisis of global proportions and we urge the government to seek to work multilaterally with international partners so that the scheme can be as effective as possible at rapidly identifying and supporting the most vulnerable and assisting them in finding safety.

- We know that there are around 3000 Afghans already in the UK with pending asylum claims (asylum seekers – see above). We urge the government to take action to extend protections to these people since it is clear that they cannot be sent back to Afghanistan under the current circumstances. We would further urge the introduction of expedited procedures for dealing with new or fresh asylum claims by Afghans over the coming period, in order that they can be assessed for stable status without delay.

Advocacy on the UK's broader refugee and asylum procedures

We cannot entirely separate the situation from the wider context of the UK's policies on asylum and refugees. We also cannot forget that though Afghanistan represents a particular crisis there are many other vulnerable refugees in the world that we would hope to see the UK playing its part in assisting.

We believe that the purpose of the asylum system must primarily lie in providing a compassionate system that operates in the best interests of the vulnerable. The UK has prided itself as a welcoming refuge from tyranny and oppression and was historically instrumental in informing and drafting international refugee conventions.

We believe that a just and fair migration system must always be mindful of human dignity, and look in all cases to recognise the essential humanity of those seeking refuge in our country. Christian teaching reminds us of our obligations to one another, and a need to see in every individual not a case or statistic, but a child loved in the eyes of God and owed dignity and respect.

We are, therefore, extremely concerned by the proposals in the Borders and Nationality Bill currently before parliament. These would create a two-tier system that would divide the relatively small number of people who arrive in designated refugee resettlement programmes from those who arrive by irregular means. The latter, even for legitimate refugees, will be deemed inadmissible and the government will attempt to remove them to safe third countries (which may not even be a country to which they have a connection). If it proves impossible to remove them within six months, access to asylum will be provided, but only as a temporary status, up to 30 months, with abridged rights and benefits, regularly reviewed, and the threat of removal.

The [UNHCR has said that these proposals](#) “would damage lives, be hard to implement and undermine international cooperation on refugee issues”. The Church of England has expressed serious misgivings about the government's proposals.

Prayer and theological resources

- [Church of England prayers for refugees](#)
- ['Refugee theology resource for churches and church groups' from The Children's Society](#)
- ['God With us' resources from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland](#)
- [Bible Society – Refugees and the stranger. Resources and videos covering what the Bible says about refugees featuring theologian Paula Gooder](#)
- [United Reformed Church: 'At home in a strange place' - A collection of resources to enable, encourage and stimulate 'sacred conversations' on migration. For use in congregations and by small groups](#)
- [The Churches' Refugee Network](#)
- ['Liberation and Entrapment Project: Mission and Migration' from the Mission Theology Advisory Group](#)
- ['Migration in Missiological Perspective' scholars explore wider issues of migration, transnationalism, and interfaith engagement as they relate to missiological thinking and practice](#)

Source URL: [*https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/community-action/toolkit-supporting-afghan-refugees*](https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/community-action/toolkit-supporting-afghan-refugees)