



Help for those seeking sanctuary from Afghanistan

Thursday, 19th August, 2021

This advice and information about our response will be revised and updated as regularly as possible via our website: www.caritassalford.org.uk

Help for those seeking sanctuary from Afghanistan

The withdrawal of US and UK troops from Afghanistan has resulted in the rapid recapture of the country by Taliban forces resulting in significant political upheaval, internal displacement within the country towards the Kabul provinces and many leaving Afghanistan seeking refuge and asylum. Recent data from the UNHCR ([16.08.21](#)) indicates that more than 5,000 people in neighbouring countries have approached them or their partners for support, most having left Afghanistan for security or conflict reasons. The total number of Afghans who have left the country is likely to be far higher than this.

The UK government is currently focused on (1) evacuating British nationals currently remaining within Afghanistan (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/afghanistan-foreign-secretary-speech>), (2) establishing a new scheme to relocate or assist Afghan citizens who were engaged as Locally Employed Staff and who are at a high risk because of their support of British and Allied Troops. They have also indicated a commitment to offer asylum to settle 20,000 Afghan refugees, over 5 years.

What do Caritas Salford currently do for Refugees and Asylum seekers?

This is a fast-moving crisis and in collaboration and dialogue with other Catholic charities, agencies and community alliances such as GM Citizens, Caritas Salford already provides extensive support to refugees and asylum seekers in the 13 local authority areas of Greater Manchester and Lancashire where we work. This includes emergency essentials such as food and basic provisions, support into accommodation, English language teaching and referral and assistance into legal services to support in accommodation. We have also supported and co-ordinated with a number of parish groups working as part of the Community Sponsorship Scheme who are focused on welcoming refugees through the UNHCR/UK Government scheme to resettle families. Finally, our Caritas's Schools Social Work Team including social workers and specialist counsellors provide regular support to refugee families and those seeking asylum.

The current number of people who originate from Afghanistan to the UK is relatively low in our area but we anticipate that this will rapidly increase with people needing assistance with basic essentials and support to resettle and integrate into life in a new country. We are currently in dialogue with accommodation providers. In particular we are seeking to secure access to 4/5 bedroomed accommodation to meet the anticipated need for resettled families. A number of schools in our diocese have already welcomed unaccompanied children from Afghanistan into their communities with all the challenges this entails.

We are already calling on the government to ensure that refugees from Afghanistan are protected. In particular, we urge the government to radically review their approach to those seeking asylum. We join with other partners within the Caritas Social Action Network, established from Catholic charities and dioceses across England and Wales, in our concern about the UK Government's Nationality and Borders Bill, currently before parliament. This narrows the UK's intentions to fulfil international humanitarian obligations on states and citizens, to permit entry, safe passage and adequate standard of living and penalises those who are forced into rough sleeping as grounds for refusing or cancelling a person's leave to remain in the UK.

What can I do to help?

Since the situation escalated several people have contacted Caritas Salford to ask what they can do to help.

PRAY

While pointing to the work of humanitarian organisations, and efforts to welcome refugees as signs of hope, Bishop Declan Lang, on behalf of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, has urged Catholics to pray for the people of Afghanistan, placing our hope in the Lord Jesus Christ in the knowledge that he will not abandon the people of Afghanistan.

Please remember especially those Christian communities and charity workers still working in Afghanistan and those refugees and asylum seekers already in the UK and consider the trauma and the fear they are experiencing for their families and friends back home.

GIVE

You can support Caritas Salford's work with Refugees and Asylum Seekers across Greater Manchester and Lancashire by making a donation to support our work. To do that you can visit: <https://www.caritassalford.org.uk/donate-3/>

ACT

1. **Write to your MP using our template** letter below (with thanks to Asylum Matters for their draft template). Make your voice heard and tell your MP how respect for refugees is vital to protecting their human dignity.
2. Establish a **Community Sponsorship Group** - it is unclear at present whether resettled Afghans are eligible for this scheme but this is a proven, well-established and effective way of welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating refugees into life in the UK. For information on how to establish a Community Sponsorship group in your parish or local community, please contact our Co-ordinator by emailing info@caritassalford.org.uk or visit <https://www.caritassalford.org.uk/service-view/community-sponsorship-of-refugees/>
3. Get in touch to **Volunteer** with Caritas Salford on any one of our projects to support refugees and asylum seekers. <https://www.caritassalford.org.uk/contact-us/>

TEMPLATE LETTER

Find your MP by visiting: <https://members.parliament.uk/members/commons>

Dear [name of your MP],

I am writing to you as a constituent after watching the harrowing images from Afghanistan where people are being forced to flee from the Taliban. I am asking that you take a stand for the Afghan people who have been suddenly and violently displaced from their homes.

The situation in Afghanistan is a stark reminder that all too often people don't choose to leave their homes. They are forced to flee, taking no more than they can carry, running towards safety, wherever they might find it. If other countries shut their borders, there would be nowhere for desperate people to go.

This is what the UK is proposing to do with the Nationality and Borders Bill, which is returning to Parliament later this year. This anti-refugee Bill aims to criminalise people travelling to safety via so-called 'irregular routes' – often the only routes available to people forced to flee for their lives, like many of those desperately seeking safety in Afghanistan. It says we should prioritise giving protection to those who wait patiently for resettlement places to become available but doesn't make any commitments to creating those safe and legal pathways.

I believe that the UK cannot call on other countries to play their part in addressing the situation in Afghanistan until we are confident that we have stepped up to the task. I am asking that you speak out on my behalf, calling for:

- A long-term commitment to a global resettlement scheme with an ambitious target that can adapt and respond to crises that unfold around the globe;
 - Country guidance for Afghanistan, which guides Home Office decision-making on asylum applications, to be updated to reflect the new context;
 - Rapid resolution of pending Afghan asylum claims and rapid review of Afghan asylum appeals, so that people are able to start rebuilding their lives in the UK;
 - Family reunion rules to be reviewed to allow for a broader range of family members to join those from Afghanistan who have settled in the UK.

Finally, and crucially, the Nationality and Borders Bill, which will make it even harder for those fleeing oppression to seek safety, needs to be radically altered. It is unthinkable that in a few months' time, some Afghan refugees will reach our shores after a perilous journey to the UK because of a lack of safe routes to get here. Under the Bill, they will be criminalised, their claims treated as inadmissible, and returned to one of the countries they have travelled through.

We have a proud record of helping those fleeing persecution, oppression or tyranny from around the world. Now, more than ever, we need to step up and provide urgent protection to Afghans fleeing for their lives.

Please feel free to get in touch with me to discuss in more detail. I look forward to hearing from you.

[Signed]