

Afghanistan and Central Asian Association – Emergency Case for Support

Resettlement of new Afghan refugees (2021-22)

'This place has become the focal point for London's Afghan community. For days, hundreds have turned up here getting news from relatives in Afghanistan, queueing to do their best to get them out' - Carl Mercer, reporting for BBC London News (26th August 2021)

With the Taliban having swept to power once again in Afghanistan after 20 years, many Afghans are fleeing for their lives. Those who had been women's and human rights defenders, charity workers and liberal politicians know that they and their families almost certainly face violent persecution under new Taliban rule. This makes the resettlement of refugees to the UK an urgent matter of life or death.

The Afghanistan & Central Asian Association (ACAA) is a London-based refugee support charity with a difference – it is based on the lived experience of its founder and much of its workforce. ACAA cannot now turn its back on those reaching out for help in this new crisis. Many have been arriving from across the country to seek our advice and support and we are overwhelmed by the number of cases that need to be addressed. We have crowds of people queueing outside from as early as 6.00am. We are responding to over 400 enquiries a day.

ACAA needs a boost to the capacity of the organisation to cope with this unprecedented demand for our help (which is more pressing now than even during the Covid crisis of 2020). We believe there will be three phases of work to help resettle this new wave of Asylum seekers from Afghanistan:

1. Immediate needs supporting UK-based Afghans

Responding to enquiries, supporting them to lobby for family members trapped in Afghanistan, giving pastoral and emotional support

2. Settlement support for new arrivals (0-6 months)

Our services include immediate advice, support and orientation – providing access to accommodation/housing, immigration advice, children's support (particularly unaccompanied minors), basic material needs

3. Longer-term support (6 months onwards)

ACAA's core services with additional capacity and tailored to new arrivals (language, culture, mental health/trauma recovery, etc)

ACAA is the obvious choice to provide support.

Action Plan

Our small staff team and dedicated volunteers have been working tirelessly and on an unprecedented scale to organise resettlement for Afghans trying to reach the UK and to provide support for families already in the UK worried about friends and relatives back in Afghanistan.

We now need additional capacity to meet both the immediate needs and longer-term requirements of supporting newly recognised Afghan refugees to settle in the UK. Our immediate priorities for additional capacity are:

- Support for New Arrivals – Coordination and provision of Advice, Orientation and Resettlement
- ESOL & language support – additional classes, rapid response and flexible provision
- Volunteer Coordination – recruitment, training and support for 50 new volunteers

Longer term, we will need additional support and capacity with legal assistance focusing on immigration, housing, and children's services, assistance with media and communications, office reception and management, and our regular service delivery adjusted to the needs of new arrivals.

Budget & fundraising targets

We have been very fortunate that some of our long-term funders have generously pledged additional funds. These include BBC Children in Need (£20,000) and City Bridge Trust (£39,000). Our crowdfunding campaign has been successful in awakening support from Afghan communities, and others, in the UK and we have stretched our target to £25,000.

- Phase 1 prioritises practical support and mentoring for new arrivals, pastoral care for UK-based families, volunteer coordination, and English language learning
- Phase 2 supplements these with legal advice and assistance, additional reception and administration capacity, communications and media management, and additional capacity across the range of ACAA services – women’s groups, supplementary schooling, sports and leisure groups.

We know the total we need for the coming year will be £230,800 and, with the donations already received, we are over 30% towards that target. We have set new targets (at September 2021):

- Phase 1 - £30,000 by December 2021
- Phase 2 - £120,000 by August 2022

Outputs and outcomes

- Recruit and train 50 new volunteers. Upskill existing volunteer workforce
- Recruit and train 50 new mentors offering 1:1 support
- Connect with and support 500+ new arrivals
- Increase capacity of existing services by 25%
- Intensify contact with partner agencies to establish a sound knowledge base from which to give meaningful advice through a helpline service
- Provide legal assistance to 500 people
- Provide consistent and accurate responses to media interest whilst raising awareness of the issues

Background

Dr. Nooralhaq Nasimi founded the organisation in 2001 only two years after arriving in the UK in the back of a lorry with his young family after fleeing the previous Taliban regime. When they arrived, they had no English language and little support to integrate but this provided the impetus to ensure that there could be support available to the people who came after him.

Since then, using a community development ethos, ACAA has developed to provide ESOL and supplementary schooling for children and young people, women’s rights-focused projects, legal and citizens advice, and community events. As one of the longest established Afghan-led UK charities, ACAA has become the go-to resource for the Afghan and Central Asian refugee and diaspora community and every year we help around 3000 people. ACAA has now been supporting the Afghan diaspora in the UK and championing human rights in Afghanistan for 20 years. Our community hall is available for hire and provides a valuable source of extra income. Our work has been recognized nationally and regionally - amongst the awards received are the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service in 2018, Refugee Support Service of the Year 2019 for London, The Community Award 2019 from the London Asian Business Awards. Dr Nasimi himself was awarded the British Citizen Award in 2020.

Since 2016 ACAA had also started delivering services back in Afghanistan, responding to the then Government’s openness to new ways of thinking on education, political engagement and women’s rights. We are now fearful for the fate of our staff and service users at our projects in Kabul and Pul-e-Khumri.