

# NEWSWEEK

AUGUST 8, 2022

## NEWS

# Afghan Refugee Resettlement Falters as U.S. and UK Renege on Promises

BY JALEN SMALL ON 8/8/22 AT 5:00 AM EDT

What Happens To Afghan Refugees Coming To The U.S.? Vetting Process Explained

**NEWS** REFUGEES AFGHAN REFUGEES UNITED KINGDOM HOUSING

Over 90,000 Afghan allies were brought into the United States and the United Kingdom after the evacuation of Kabul last August.

And while many of these individuals were expecting protection or asylum for their contributions during the war against the [Taliban](#), since arriving in their respective host countries they have faced poor housing conditions, difficulty finding gainful employment, and a bewildering mountain of paperwork demanded by immigration authorities.

The refugee resettlement systems have been so overwhelmed by the volume of arrivals that the "welcome" many have received is far from

ideal. Now, nearly one year after the U.S. withdrawal, thousands of Afghans feel abandoned by the Western allies that they chose to help, as more and more families slip through the cracks.

"Afghans are immensely grateful that they were able to escape and that we took them in," said Harv Hilowitz, founder of the Afghan Circle of the Hudson Valley, a New York-based group of local volunteers formed to help welcome and resettle Afghan refugees. "But they are frustrated to hear that there are 40,000 Afghans still in front of them seeking asylum, and frustrated at the length of time it takes to get things done."

**[NEWSWEEK NEWSLETTER SIGN-UP >](#)**

"They thought that they would get benefits from the government," he added, "and that has not been the case."



A U.S. military service member speaks with Afghan children in the recreation area of an Afghan refugee camp on November 4, 2021 in Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico. The Department of Defense and U.S. Department of Homeland Security's initiative, Operation Allies Welcome, aims to support and house Afghan refugees as they transition into more permanent housing in the US. PHOTO BY JON

CHERRY/GETTY IMAGES

Both President Joe Biden and then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the United Kingdom called welcoming new Afghan arrivals a "national obligation." Together, the two countries have committed to resettling over 100,000 Afghan refugees since the evacuation of Kabul last year.

While some relocated Afghans have found housing and employment networks quickly, many have been left to fend for themselves in both countries nearly one year into their resettlement.

Lodging complaints from Afghan refugees continue to mount in both the U.S. and the U.K., but the struggle to find acceptable accommodations for them remains, as thousands of Afghans remain in hotel rooms to continue their months-long wait for more permanent housing.

"We have been trying to assist families around the country, particularly in Northern Virginia, Sacramento, and San Diego," Hilowitz said, "and nobody can find housing for them."

Hilowitz told *Newsweek* that his Circle has been trying to help an Afghan family of six adults who had been living in one room in a motel shelter in San Diego. The oldest daughter had garnered international attention as a member of the first-ever women's ultra-marathon team in Afghanistan.

"She fled with her family after being hunted by the Taliban," Hilowitz said.

One of her brothers is paraplegic, and Hilowitz told *Newsweek* that he had been hospitalized in San Diego "because of medical neglect." They were due to be evicted from the motel on July 31, but Hilowitz said he reached out to other aid organizations around the country, and was able to find them temporary housing beginning August 5 in Tennessee — more than 2,000 miles from San Diego.

The cost of housing in the U.S. typically puts it beyond the limited resources of the private aid organizations.

"Housing is super expensive," Hilowitz said. "These resettlement organizations do not have money, and the local circles like mine are struggling because we cannot afford to rent any units."

Afghan refugees have also expressed concern over their ability to secure gainful employment in their countries of arrival.

While no official database keeps track of Afghan refugee employment in the United States, Gideon Maltz, executive director of the Tent Partnership for Refugees, believes that it is one of the most critical components of successful resettlement and integration.

"While some of them are getting help from resettlement agencies or sponsorship circles, the financial strain on them is still high," Maltz told *Newsweek*, "so that first job is very important."

"Many Afghans arrived with nothing and cannot access their money back home," he added. "They have a minimal financial cushion, which places huge stress on them."

Without a reliable income stream, refugees increasingly depend on government aid and financial assistance. That has served as an incentive for Afghan refugees to try to find a job as soon as possible.

Getting that first job provides a sense of security and relief to many refugees. And while it may provide enough income to get by, many Afghans are pushed to take positions in industries like hospitality, food processing, manufacturing or retail services, often well below their qualifications or previous pay rate.

"While the overall story on employment is good," Maltz said, "it is always challenging for people who come here with the highest skills,

as many Afghans do, to get a first job commensurate with their level of expertise."

Considering the obstacles, advocates are pushing to put more onus on the government to provide additional funding to programs and support housing and job placement efforts more effectively.

### **READ MORE**

- [With Thousands of Afghans Still Unsettled, US Focuses On Ukraine Refugees](#)
- [As Governments Fail Them, Ukrainian Refugees Turn to People for Help](#)
- [Afghans Worldwide Plead for Support As Taliban Terrorizes Their Relatives](#)
- [The War May Be Over, but for Afghan Refugees the Battle Has Just Begun](#)

Hilowitz told *Newsweek* that the U.S. government is doing a "good job," but that American immigration organizations are having to operate beyond their capabilities in trying to meet the demand.

"It would be great if the government continued to increase funding to agencies and resettlement groups so that they could add more employees, caseworkers, and legal services," Hilowitz said.

The resettlement infrastructure of both countries has been crippled by spiking demand, rising prices, and low resources, which has shifted much of the resettlement burden on communities and citizens in the interim.

Calling this the "biggest national humanitarian effort since the Underground Railroad," Hilowitz said that "the actual resettlement (in the U.S.) is being done by regular civilians across the country, in every city, town, and neighborhood."

"They're doing the heavy lifting," Hilowitz said. "The government is not doing it."

Although community groups have made tremendous strides in helping refugee families, he reiterated that too many Afghans have been left behind — forgotten in a country with no reliable assistance, support, money or shelter.

"Thousands of Afghans are still stranded today, and that is a fact," Hilowitz said.