



Housing Initiatives for Afghan Evacuees Continue to Evolve for Other Groups

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Operations Allies Welcome Overview

On August 29, 2021, President Biden directed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to lead, coordinate, and periodically update efforts across the federal government to welcome and support Afghans leaving their homeland when the U.S.-supported Afghan government collapsed. Those who worked with U.S. diplomats, military members, women’s and girls’ rights activists, press freedom advocates, and non-government organizations were prioritized for welcome in the United States. To lead the effort in support of Operation Allies Welcome (OAW), DHS created a Unified Coordination Group with partners in state and local government, non-profits, and the private sector. ([DHS Resettlement of At-Risk Afghans](#))

Refugee Housing Solutions

Refugee Housing Solutions (RHS), a project of Church World Service funded by the State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) was initiated in late 2021 as part of OAW. The RHA goal was to provide technical assistance (TA) and a cohesive strategy for all nine PRM Resettlement Agencies to increase the availability and affordability of housing for Afghans and other newcomers to the U.S., including previously vetted refugees. Since the project’s start, the RHS team has worked with government, private sector, and non-profit partners to expand access to quality housing for refugees and newcomers resettled through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).

Resources and partnerships built at the height of Operation Allies Welcome include official State Department partner Resettlement Agencies (listed below) for whom RHS was created. Additionally, 200+ local resettlement agency affiliates nationwide are key partners who, along with all stakeholders, have access to dynamic RHS website which is regularly updated for all stakeholders’ use.

Bethany Christian Services (BCS), Church World Service (CWS), Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and World Relief Corporation (WR).



In partnership with additional stakeholders, especially State Refugee Coordinators and rental housing providers, a National Housing Working Group and regional communities of practice were formed in response to the coordination needs of all refugee and newcomer welcoming initiatives. Other RHS innovation highlights that evolved in response to APA expansion were on-demand TA about rental housing – the basics and creative innovations. TA was designed and delivered to all resettlement service providers who requested it. A priority TA recipient was agencies' housing specialists and volunteers seeking to help refugees and other newcomers settle safely in communities across the U.S.

Another important aspect of RHS engagement in helping Afghans settle in the U.S. was a partnership with Team Rubicon, a non-profit comprised of American military veterans and others, created in 2010. The initiative was another component of the APA program wherein PRM funded CWS to partner with Team Rubicon (TR) to support communities nationwide through refugee resettlement agencies in helping Afghans settled. Hundreds of Team Rubicon volunteers and short-term, full-time employees engaged to help Afghan newcomers by securing donations and procuring essential household goods, which they then managed, along with their own and local volunteers for new home set-up and move-in assistance.

During OAW, 86,000 Afghan were settled in myriad cities and smaller communities nationwide while efforts continue to bring more Afghans safely to the U.S. through Operation Enduring Welcome (from October 1, 2022) as circumstances, resources, and world events allow and through Operation Allies Refuge, which is for Special Interest Visa holders who directly helped U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan.

Importantly for the larger goals of the Refugee Housing solutions initiative, lessons learned from welcoming and supporting Afghans were incorporated into welcoming others. In 2023, RHS will continue engaging an expanding number of stakeholders to provide informational resources and virtual education and training focused on innovative ways to access existing safe, affordable housing and to create new housing for Afghans and other newcomers, including Ukrainians and other newcomers to the U.S.



••••• Federal, State, and Local Government Programs •••••

The Foundational Role of Early Federal, State, and Local Government Programs for Afghans and Others

When Afghan evacuees first arrived in the U.S. in the late summer of 2021, the Department of Defense provided temporary housing on military bases designated as Safe Havens across the U.S. In addition to being in a safe space from which to complete all due documentation for being in the U.S., Afghans had access to a range of services, including food, clothing, medical care, and mental health services. Those eligible to work were able to apply for authorization with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and all Afghans, including unaccompanied children, were connected with an official resettlement agencies (RA) that would help them settle into communities as they left the Safe Havens.

As the situation evolved and Afghans were given humanitarian parole and, with engagement of RA-affiliated local refugee resettlement agencies and community partners, the State Department's Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA) program supported relocation, including funds for 30 to 90 days after arrival in a new community. Resettlement agencies and community partners received the funds and a per person amount went to families as direct assistance for housing and necessities like food, clothing, and furnishings. PRM also provided millions of dollars of additional direct assistance for housing.

Beyond health services received at the Save Havens, new ones – as Afghans moved to communities – included more cultural orientation and English language classes as well as help with children's school enrollment, access to immigration assistance, and referral to other social, medical, and employment services. For Afghans for whom permanent housing was not readily found, a Housing on Demand (HOD) initiative (now ended) was given limited PRM funds to pay for temporary housing for APA eligible families and individuals for a maximum of 90 days and only no other housing options were possible.

As noted above, for Refugee Housing Solutions overarching goals, partnerships formed and lessons learned from engaging with the U.S. government's departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services as well as State are being used in welcoming and supporting more Afghans and other refugees, asylum seekers, and others who come to the U.S. seeking a safe place to call home.