

**PROPOSED TO**

Operation Allies Welcome



INDIANA  
DEPARTMENT OF  
**WORKFORCE**  
DEVELOPMENT

# WORKING WITH AFGHAN EVACUEES

**A CULTURAL COMPETENCY RESOURCE TOOLKIT  
FOR INDIANA WORKERS AND CAREER COACHES**

Indiana Department of Workforce Development  
Workforce Education and Training

**PREPARED BY**

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# NOTES

## ABOUT THE PREPARTION PROCESS



It is hard to access first-hand cultural norm materials without networking with Afghani people or people that work directly with refugees. Cultural taboos are hard to search online and to access a credible source of them. Throughout the process of researching and material gathering, I reached out to several refugee organizations as well as resources at Indiana University. I have gathered some great insights to include in this guide.

Please enjoy this resource guide, and reach out if you have any questions!

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### Thanks to the people I reached out to:

Professor Brenda Bailey-Hughes - Senior Lecturer at Kelley School of Business, Indiana University (Teaches about global perspectives and international competencies)

Rita Koryan - Office of the Vice President for International Affairs, Indiana University

Cole Varga - Executive Director of Exodus Refugee Immigration INC.

Professor Dr. Elisheva Cohen - Middle East Region, Post PhD Fellow at Department of International Studies, Indiana University

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# BACKGROUND

## ABOUT OPERATION ALLIES

According to the Department of Homeland Security, On August 29, 2021, President Biden directed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to lead implementation of ongoing efforts across the federal government to support vulnerable Afghans, including those who worked alongside us in Afghanistan for the past two decades, as they safely resettle in the United States. These coordinated efforts are known as Operation Allies Welcome. At the President's direction, the Secretary of Homeland Security will work with representatives from across the government to coordinate our response and ensure unity of effort across the federal government.

## ABOUT CAMP ATTERBURY

According to IndyStar, the Indiana site is one of eight across the country hosting evacuees as part of Operation Allies Welcome, a Homeland Security effort offering refuge to Afghans in the aftermath of the Taliban takeover. More than 70,000 people have settled at the sites across the country, and the majority of the evacuees worked alongside the United States during the 20-year war in Afghanistan.

From the statistics published by IndyStar, there are total of 6603 refugees, 82 buildings, and the demographic consists 57.6% Male & 42.4% Female. In comparison, the town of Edinburgh (where Camp Atterbury is at) has only 4800 residents.

47.4% of them are under age of 18, 40% of whom are under 14.



## ABOUT AFGHANISTAN



Afghanistan, landlocked multiethnic country located in the heart of south-central Asia. Lying along important trade routes connecting southern and eastern Asia to Europe and the Middle East, Afghanistan has long been a prize sought by empire builders, and for millennia great armies have attempted to subdue it, leaving traces of their efforts in great monuments now fallen to ruin. The country's forbidding landscape of deserts and mountains has laid many imperial ambitions to rest, as has the tireless resistance of its fiercely independent peoples—so independent that the country has failed to coalesce into a nation but has instead long endured as a patchwork of contending ethnic factions and ever-shifting alliances.

The modern boundaries of Afghanistan were established in the late 19th century in the context of a rivalry between imperial Britain and tsarist Russia that Rudyard Kipling termed the "Great Game." Modern Afghanistan became a pawn in struggles over political ideology and commercial influence. In the last quarter of the 20th century, Afghanistan suffered the ruinous effects of civil war greatly exacerbated by a military invasion and occupation by the Soviet Union (1979–89). In subsequent armed struggles, a surviving Afghan communist regime held out against Islamic insurgents (1989–92), and, following a brief rule by mujahideen groups, an austere movement of religious students—the Taliban—rose up against the country's governing parties and warlords and established a theocratic regime (1996–2001) that soon fell under the influence of a group of well-funded Islamists led by an exiled Saudi Arabian, Osama bin Laden. The Taliban regime collapsed in December 2001 in the wake of a sustained U.S.-dominated military campaign aimed at the Taliban and fighters of bin Laden's al-Qaeda organization. Soon thereafter, anti-Taliban forces agreed to a period of transitional leadership and an administration that would lead to a new constitution and the establishment of a democratically elected government.

The capital of Afghanistan is its largest city, Kabul. A serene city of mosques and gardens during the storied reign of the emperor Bābur (1526–30), founder of the Mughal dynasty, and for centuries an important entrepôt on the Silk Road, Kabul lay in ruins following the long and violent Afghan War. So, too, fared much of the country, its economy in shambles and its people scattered and despondent. By the early 21st century an entire generation of Afghans had come to adulthood knowing nothing but war.

*(Adapted from Britannica)*

## AFGHANISTAN FACTS

### GEOGRAPHY

Area: Total: 652,230 sq km, Land: 652,230 sq km, Water: 0 sq km

Climate: arid to semiarid; cold winters and hot summers

Natural Resources: natural gas, petroleum, coal, copper, chromite, talc, barites, sulfur, lead, zinc, iron ore, salt, precious and semiprecious stones, arable land

### ECONOMY

Economic Overview: Extremely low-income South Asian economy; import drops, currency depreciation, disappearing central bank reserves, and increasing inflation after Taliban takeover; increasing Chinese trade; hit hard by COVID; ongoing sanctions  
GDP (Purchasing Power Parity): \$77.04 billion (2020 est.)

GDP per capita (Purchasing Power Parity): \$2,000 (2020 est.)

Industries: brick production, textiles, soap, furniture, shoes, fertilizer, apparel, food products, non-alcoholic beverages, mineral, water, cement, handwoven carpets, natural gas, coal

Agricultural products: wheat, milk, grapes, vegetables, potatoes, watermelons, melons, rice, onions, apples

Exports: \$1.48 billion (2020 est.): gold, grapes, opium, fruits and nuts, insect resins, cotton, handwoven carpets, soapstone, scrap metal (2019)

- Partners: UAE 45%, Pakistan 24%, India 22%, China 1% (2019)

Imports: \$6.98 billion (2020 est.): wheat flours, broadcasting equipment, refined petroleum, rolled tobacco, aircraft parts, synthetic fabrics (2019)

- Partners: UAE 23%, Pakistan 17%, India 13%, China 9%, US 9%, Uzbekistan 7%, Kazakhstan 6% (2019)

### PEOPLE & SOCIETY

Population: 37.5 million (July 2021 est.)

Population Growth: 2.34% (2021 est.)

Ethnicity: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, other (includes smaller numbers of Baloch, Turkmen,

Nuristani, Pamiri, Arab, Gujar, Brahui, Qizilbash, Aimaq, Pashai, and Kyrgyz) (2015)

Language: Afghan Persian or Dari (official) 78% (Dari functions as the lingua franca), Pashto (official) 50%, Uzbek 10%, English 5%, Turkmen 2%, Urdu 2%, Pashayi 1%, Nuristani 1%, Arabic 1%, Balochi 1%, other <1% (2017 est.)

Religion: Muslim 99.7% (Sunni 84.7 - 89.7%, Shia 10 - 15%), other 0.3% (2009 est.)

*(Adapted from CIA World Factbook)*

# ABOUT AFGHAN CULTURES

## RELIGIONS

According to Britannica, religion has played a paramount role in the daily life and social customs of Afghanistan.

These beliefs drive everything from the way someone dresses, greets others, uses the bathroom, eats, sleeps and works.

Afghanistan appeared to be on a course of Islamization: the sale of alcohol was banned, and women were pressured to cover their heads in public and adopt traditional Muslim dress.

Taliban enforced its Islamic code in areas under its control. These measures included banning television sets and most other forms of entertainment. Men who failed to grow beards and leave them untrimmed were fined and jailed—full beardedness being perceived by extremists as the mark of a Muslim—and little mercy was shown to convicted criminals.



According to Commisceo Global, Ramadan is an important, month long event, in Afghanistan and something that most Afghans look forward to. During this holy month Afghans fast from dawn to dusk and are typically only permitted to work six hours per day. Fasting includes no eating, drinking (including water), cigarette smoking, or gum chewing. Muslims are also required to abstain from bad thoughts and sinful behaviour.

## GENDERS

Most Afghans observe a public separation of the genders that is legally enforced in some cases. Mixing of males and females only really occurs within families or closely knit village communities.

People are cautious to maintain a physical distance from the other gender.



## FAMILY

According to Cultural Atlas, One's family is the single most important aspect of life in Afghanistan. Afghan culture is very collectivistic and people generally put their family's interests before their own. This means that family responsibilities tend to hold a greater importance than personal needs.

Throughout all of Afghanistan, family matters are kept strictly private. People are often reluctant to share personal issues with non-family members as community knowledge of a family's struggles can bring shame on the household.

Women may be slightly more likely to open up to other women about their personal life, but usually family matters are kept within the family.

## SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Tribal affiliation is still the most significant organizing principle in parts of rural Afghan society. Tribal units have strong patrilineal organization – something that perhaps comes almost by nature to nomads and those with a remembered and idealized nomadic past. The patrilineal principle is also strongly supported by Islam. Leading families are recognized on the basis of land or livestock ownership, their reputation for religious leadership, or for having furnished men who exhibit the ideal Afghan personality type of the warrior-poet.

Afghans may operate at many different levels of group identification. The cultural pattern is one of competition between equivalent units but uniting with these competitors against outsiders. This begins at the level of competition between male first cousins and works its way up through lineages, subtribes, tribes, to ethnic group rivalries. The pattern allows nearly all Afghans to unite, at least at times, against outside threats, as was to great extent the case against the Soviet invasion.



# CULTURAL NORMS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN WORKING WITH THE EVACUEES

## General Advices *(Exclusively provided by Dr. Cohen, Indiana University)*

- Encourage people to approach refugees with an asset based lens rather than a deficit lens. Don't focus on what they don't have and how much they need to learn but rather focus on identifying their strengths and all that they bring
- Keep in mind the trauma that the population has gone through and continues to go through and extend patience, flexibility, and grace
- Consider gender norms and be respectful of them. This does not mean that women do not have agency, rather it means that men and women operate in slightly different worlds. Women may not be comfortable speaking with men and vice versa...
- Keep in mind their Muslim faith. This means helping them to advocate for themselves in the workplace for prayer time, for hallal food, etc.



**Trauma/PTSD**

- Recognize the trauma caused by over 40 years of continued war and its devastating impact on Afghanistan's people, culture and society
- Be sensitive to the experiences that Afghan refugees have endured. There is a high occurrence of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder among those that have witnessed the loss of their family and friends
- Be sensitive not to push for details of their personal experiences in Afghanistan



**Considerations**

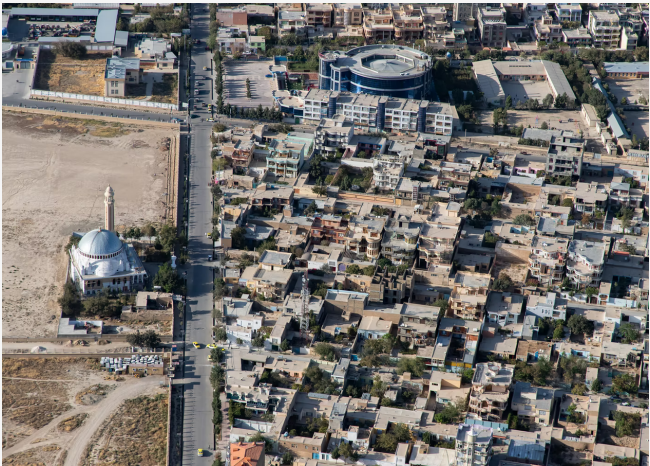
- Avoid mentioning the topics of ethnic tension, politics, the Taliban, warfare or women's rights. These are sensitive subjects in Afghanistan and such discussions can lead a person to recall negative experiences
- Afghans generally consider dogs to be unclean and will generally want to wash their hands after coming in contact with one. Some people may be quite afraid of dogs



**Gender**

- One should not touch people of the opposite gender unless they are very close family or friends. It is seen as dishonouring a woman if a man were to touch her in public
- Male Workers SHOULD NOT shake female client's hand, and the only time a male worker can work with female client is when their family member are present
- Leave the door open if talking one on one with an Afghan of the opposite gender
- If in a group of Afghan men and women in public, expect the males to talk to each other without the females engaging in conversation after introductions. They may only feel comfortable talking to their own gender once they are together alone
- It is extremely inappropriate and disrespectful for men to enquire about an Afghan man's female family members





### Greetings

- Men may greet women by placing their hand over their heart and nodding. This greeting may also be used to greet other people who you perceive are unaccustomed to being touched
- Eye contact should be kept to a minimum during greetings out of modesty, especially between men and women
- A common verbal greeting is “Salam” or “Salam alaikum”, meaning “Peace be upon you”. People usually place their right hand over their heart when they speak, to show respect and sincerity in the greeting

### Religion

- It is an obligation for Muslims are to pray five times a day - at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening
- Sunset is marked by the coming together of communities and families to share in a communal meal known as 'iftar' and to partake in group prayers and extra worship
- Friday is a holy day for Muslims. In Afghanistan, most businesses close on this day and Thursday in respect of that
- Do not assume that all Afghan Muslims follow a conservative interpretation of Islam. The official position of many Afghan religious leaders does not reflect the interpretations of all Afghan people



### Communication - Verbal

- Afghans tend to speak both directly and indirectly depending on whom they are interacting with. When the person is older, or of the opposite gender, communication tends to be quite indirect, and respectful. However, for people their own age or younger, conversation can become more direct and open. Afghans generally admire people who are articulate
- Raised Voices: Raising one's voice at someone in public is very disrespectful and likely to make everyone feel intensely uncomfortable. In Afghanistan, raised voices can make surrounding people scared that something dangerous (e.g. an attack) is about to occur
- Blessings: Blesses and curses are said on a daily basis in Afghanistan. These are short expressions that wish for God's intervention depending on the situation (e.g. "May God give you health" or "May God curse your soul"). Blessings are often said instead of a 'Thank you'



### Communication - Nonverbal

- Hands: This custom is tied to Islamic principles that prescribe the left hand should be used for hygiene purposes. Therefore, it is considered more unclean and should not be used for functions such as waving, eating or offering items. Always use the right hand to gesture, touch people or offer items
- Personal Space: Afghans usually give people of the opposite gender a respectful amount of personal space – usually around an arm's length. However, people often sit/stand very close to those who are of the same gender. Some Afghans may stand at proximities that you consider uncomfortable or within your personal space. It is likely they have not been made aware of the discomfort some Westerners feel with it and do not realise the awkwardness
- Nodding: Consider that nodding may not necessarily indicate that an individual understands or agrees with what you are saying. An Afghan may nod out of politeness





# HOW TO WORK ACROSS CULTURES

## TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND

### 1: Embracing positive indifference

Positive indifference is the ability to overlook many cultural differences as being not especially important or worthy of attention, while remaining optimistic about the process of engaging the culture seen as foreign. It's about adapting to work practices that may at first seem culturally foreign – such as having to wear an identification badge or file frequent key performance indicator reports – without becoming unduly troubled.

### 2: Seeking commonality between cultures

This enables you and your clients to draw closer to a foreign culture and become receptive to its differences, in line with characteristic number one. The commonalities you find may be different from anyone else's and not initially obvious.

For example, a French employee at Rakuten found commonality with his Japanese coworkers by recognizing that both cultures are results-oriented and prone to analyzing processes for how they could be improved. An Indonesian engineer found commonality with Rakuten's requirement that employees spend five minutes per week cleaning their desks by comparing it to his practice of washing his feet and hands when entering a mosque. In his mind, both cleaning rituals demonstrated commitment and responsibility to a particular place.

Seeking commonality is important because it draws people from diverse cultures closer, which in turn translates to more effective collaboration and teamwork.

### 3: Seeking interactions with other, geographically distant subsidiaries

This behavior is important to global work orientation because, in general, when interactions are high, there is a greater ability to develop trust and shared vision among people. Interactions are also vital for sharing knowledge across sites. As such, tacit knowledge can become more explicit; sharing information or best practices can become advantageous. Learning from other countries, especially other developing countries, is very, very key.

*(Adapted from Harvard Business Review)*

# COMMUNICATING ACROSS CULTURES

The strategies below can be effective when communicating across cultures.

## **Know yourself**

- Understand why you are pursuing this subject biases, assumptions, attitudes, likes and dislikes.

## **Learn about different cultures and values**

- Both within and outside the US.

## **Use shared language**

- Avoid slang and jargon. Use day-to-day vocabulary.

## **Take your time**

- Don't jump to conclusions. Allow someone to finish, relax, be flexible.

## **Consider physical and human setting**

- This includes one's physical environment and context, customs, past practice and timing.

## **Improve communication skills**

- Listen and be attentive. Concentrate on explicit signals and be sensitive to implicit cues. Be aware of nonverbal cues and communication. Establish common goals.

## **Encourage feedback**

- Allow for correction and adjustment of message: Create a comfortable environment. Ask questions, and listen intently to responses.

## **Develop empathy**

- Understand and appreciate the worldview of others. Treat others as you want to be treated.

*(Adapted from Washington University in St. Louis  
Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion)*

# HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS

## 5 Tips for Talking with Non-Native English Speakers

- Speak slowly, use clear pronunciation, and ask the other person to speak more slowly as well.
- Use simple words when possible. Refrain from using idioms or expressions that your conversation partner may not understand.
- Be honest! Don't pretend to understand something if you don't.
- Remember that communicating with someone who doesn't speak English well or clearly can be frustrating for both of you. Patience always helps!
- Make a point of learning a few words in different languages. Being able to say "Hello" "How are you?" or "Thank you" in the other person's language can relieve tension and make everyone feel more comfortable.

## 5 Ways to Be a Resource for Non-Native English Speakers

- Begin by asking general and open-ended questions about the person's experience communicating with English speakers.
- Share a story about someone you know who has benefited from English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction or American accent training. Explain the positive impact it's had on that person.
- Be mindful of when and where you bring up the topic. Be sensitive, and respect the other person's privacy.
- Acknowledge that a referral may not be right for them, but offer to pass on contact information if interested. Remember to follow up with a list of resources as promised.

*(Adapted from AccentAccurate)*

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