

Compassionate support for Afghan-Australians

Many of us will be aware of the devastating news from Afghanistan these past few weeks. After the government takeover from the Taliban, many fear for their lives and their livelihoods, and the civil and political rights of Afghans, particularly women, are in threat. Women are unable to leave their homes without a male chaperone; the healthcare system (which mainly relies on foreign aid) is on the brink of collapse; hospitals are operating in the dark; and people are being executed by armed forces.

Thousands have fled the country already, but thousands more are stuck with nowhere to go.



Photo by [Ehimetalor Akhere Unuabona](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Many Afghan-Australians living here in Victoria have family stuck in Afghanistan, and they fear for the safety of their loved ones.

Certain ethnic minorities are forced to leave their homes and hometowns and move to other areas. Those attending peaceful demonstrations, particularly women, are beaten or responded to with gunfire.

Furthermore, many schools remain closed, the rate of unemployment has increased dramatically, and people are unable to access their money saved in local banks.

"I can't even start to describe what it has been like for those who have family stuck in Afghanistan, it has been horrific. The families are experiencing anger, fear for the safety of their families, frustration, helplessness, loneliness, isolation, stress..." says Emma*, CatholicCare Victoria Refugee Support Worker.

Our teams have been providing both practical and emotional support to impacted families, including assistance with visa information, mental health support and check-ins, updates from Afghan Associations, legal assistance, and sharing translated resources and information.

With hundreds of Afghan families on their way to Victoria, our workers are also providing firsthand support to newly-arrived refugees.

Gula Bezhan, who has recently been appointed to the Federal Government advisory panel on the Australian resettlement of Afghan nationals, and who is the founder and president of the Afghan Women's Organisation in Victoria, also works in our Refugee Settlement team and has put together somewhere near 600 care packages for Afghan families arriving in Melbourne.

Once a refugee herself, Gula fled Afghanistan 26 years ago and knew that many families were fleeing with little more than the clothes on their backs.

The care packages Gula has put together included Afghan bread, snacks and tea, toys for kids, and warm clothes for Melbourne's colder weather.

What support do Afghans and Afghan-Australians need right now?

Information, guidance and support to help families evacuate/sponsor their loved ones

"Afghan-Australians need information, guidance and support in terms of how to help them evacuate their loved ones remaining in Afghanistan who, for some, face persecution by the Taliban," says Emma.

"The community has been advised to lodge humanitarian applications for their family members, however, they don't know how to do it. One way we could provide further support is to collaborate with an immigration agent to deliver sessions on how to sponsor family members into Australia using the Humanitarian Visa opportunities, and to help them lodge applications with support in their first language."

"We also had one client who was helping to submit visa applications on behalf of her family, but her laptop was dropped and the screen was damaged. So we assisted her financially and with the sourcing of a new device."

Simpler processes to assist in crisis situations

"When people are stressed and emotional, to have so many forms to complete for each family member it is so hard," says Emma.

These processes need to be made with people in mind, and must consider how simplifying processes can make a positive difference for those experiencing crises.

Mental health support, including counselling

"The situation in Afghanistan is affecting the mental wellbeing of many Afghan community members, particularly with those who have loved ones in Afghanistan and who fear for their safety. Not only do they need mental health support, but they need to know where to find it and how to access it. And they need culturally sensitive and relevant support, in their own language," says Emma.

Community support and support networks

"Afghan-Australians need to know that Australians and their support networks really care. Just sending out an email and text to my clients to acknowledge that I was thinking of them and their families was greatly received," says Emma.

"With the extra layer of the lockdowns in Victoria, it has been really hard to show that you care, but being available in the evenings and over the weekends to reply to emails and texts has been really valuable."

Emma received lots of feedback from clients to thank her and the team for the support they have given:

“Thank you so much for your love and support, it is very upsetting the situation in Afghanistan... so many people are stuck in Kabul and they just can’t escape,” says one client.

“Thank you for checking in with us, we are devastated,” says another.

Practical support for evacuated Afghans living in temporary or rental accommodation

Families and individuals fleeing Afghanistan have been unable to bring with them anything more than what can fit in a small carry bag.

Food, clothes and financial assistance are some of the basic but urgent needs for those who have recently arrived in Victoria.

If you would like to provide support to Afghan-Australians and those fleeing Afghanistan, please contact our Settlement Engagement and Transition Support team in Dandenong on [**\(03\) 8710 9600**](tel:0387109600) or email [**dandenong@ccam.org.au**](mailto:dandenong@ccam.org.au)

Read more about the Afghanistan crisis:

- [**'Now I have no hope': How life has changed for women living in Kabul**](#) – 9 News
- [**Taliban are back - what next for Afghanistan?**](#) – BBC News
- [**What happened in Afghanistan: What we know about its collapse, Taliban takeover, evacuations**](#) – USA today
- [**The Taliban in Afghanistan**](#) – Council on Foreign Relations
- [**Giving birth under the Taliban**](#) – BBC News

Access support / learn more:

- [**Settlement Engagement and Transition Support program**](#) - CatholicCare Victoria
- [**Afghanistan update**](#) – Australian Government Department of Home Affairs

**At CatholicCare Victoria, we respect everyone who comes to us for help and those who work in our teams to support people in need. While the stories and quotes are true, some staff names have been changed to protect their privacy.*