

*Cook County Commission  
on Human Rights*



# **Report: Needs of Afghan Refugees and Asylum Seekers In Cook County**



*Presented to the  
Cook County Board  
of Commissioners*

*January 2022*



**TONI PRECKWINKLE**

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**I. Background of Afghan Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the United States**

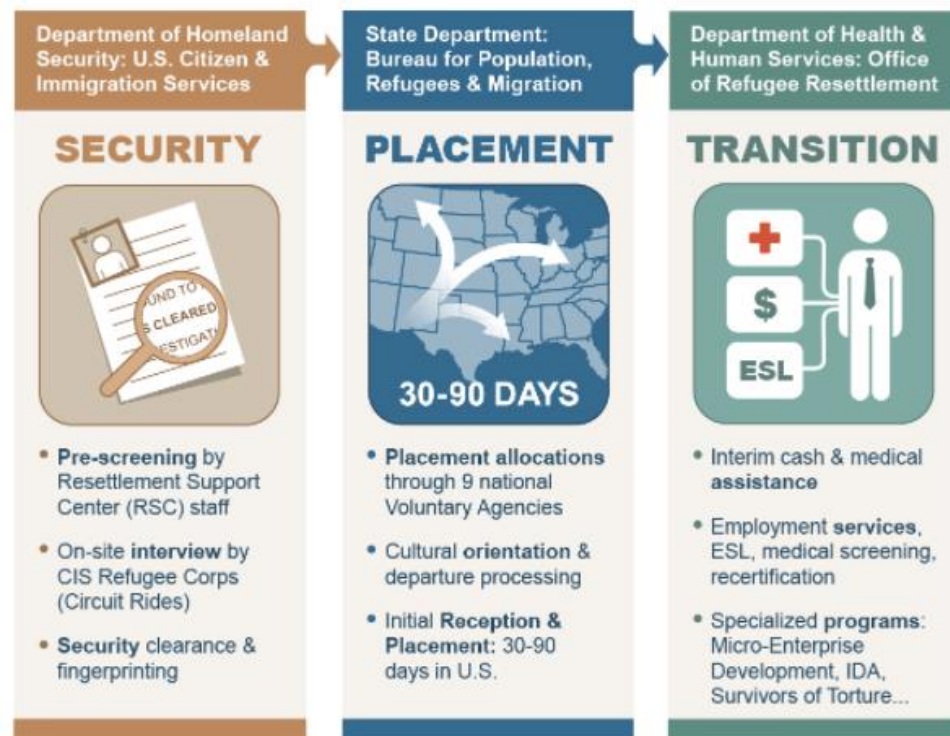
On August 30, 2021, the United States (U.S.) military ended a nearly 20-year occupation of Afghanistan. The war ultimately ended in a collapse of the Afghan government and an overtaking of the government by the Taliban. Due to the catastrophic violence and bloodshed resulting from the U.S. withdrawal and bombings at the Kabul airport, Afghan refugees and asylum seekers have fled their country, home, and families and require resettlement in other countries. According to reports, the U.S. federal government is preparing to welcome 50,000 Afghan refugees into the U.S. in the next year, with at least 1,500 expected to resettle in Cook County.

Through resolution, the Cook County Board of Commissioners called a hearing to obtain recommendations as to how Cook County and the greater community can marshal its resources to support Afghan refugees.

**II. Current Efforts Throughout the State of Illinois**

**A. Evacuation and Resettlement within the State of Illinois**

The United States government evacuated 130,000 Afghans by August 31, 2021. Most Afghans were initially transferred to eight (8) military bases throughout the U.S., including Fort McCoy in Wisconsin and Camp Atterbury in Indiana.



Source: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/policy-guidance/us-refugee-resettlement-program-overview>

The State of Illinois' commitment to Afghan resettlement includes: [1] Providing public benefits for all refugees, [2] Increased case management support for resettlement agencies, [3] Refugee case management, [4] Refugee health clinics, and [5] Additional legal and housing supports and mental wellness support for unaccompanied minors. The Illinois Department of Human Services' **Office of Welcoming Centers for Refugee and Immigrant Services** is the lead organizing and facilitating body between the U.S. government and resettlement agencies.

#### B. Cook County Resettlement Agencies & Current Arrivals

Resettlement agencies are responsible to provide services, including case management, health screenings, immunizations, ongoing care, job placements and readiness trainings, financial literacy and English language trainings, family stabilization services, mental health resources, and other supportive services. Six resettlement agencies are the primary service providers for Afghans resettling in Cook County.

Afghans are gradually being transferred out of military bases to localized resettlement agencies. Afghan arrivals stand at 724 as of November 30, 2021, up from 631 on November 18, 2021. The total number that resettlement agencies have committed to support has risen to 1,604 up from 1,565. The U.S. government is currently requesting that the State of Illinois significantly increase committed support.

<b>Illinois Refugee Resettlement Agencies</b>	<b>Afghan Parolees</b>	<b>Geographic Area</b>
<b><u><a href="#">World Relief Corporation (WR)</a></u></b>		
World Relief Corporation–Aurora (WRA)	96	Aurora
World Relief Corporation–DuPage (WRD)	78	DuPage
<u>World Relief Corporation–Quad Cities (WRQ)</u>	175	Moline
World Relief Corporation–Chicago (WRC)	100	Chicago
<b><u><a href="#">United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)</a></u></b>		
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Rockford (CCAR)	50	Rockford
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago (CCAC)	50	Chicago
The Refugee Center	30	Champaign
<b><u><a href="#">Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC)</a></u></b>		
Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago (ECAC)	275	Chicago
<b><u><a href="#">US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)</a></u></b>		
Heartland Human Care Services (HHCS)	275	Chicago
<b><u><a href="#">Church World Service (CWS)</a></u></b>		
RefugeeOne (R1)	350	Chicago
RefugeeOne (R1)	75	Champaign
<b><u><a href="#">Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)</a></u></b>		
JCFS/HIAS Chicago	50	Skokie/North Chicago
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,604</b>	

**Contact information:**

***Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago:***

Website:

<https://www.catholiccharities.net/GetHelp/OurServices/RefugeeResettlementServices.aspx>

Phone - Refugee Resettlement Program: (312) 655-7856

***Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago:***

Website: <https://www.ecachicago.org/in-kind-donations/>

<https://www.ecachicago.org/volunteer-opportunities/>

Phone: (773) 508-0303

Email: [info@eachicago.org](mailto:info@eachicago.org)

***Heartland Human Care Services:***

Website: <https://www.heartlandalliance.org/afghan-refugees>

<https://www.heartlandalliance.org/program/rics>

Phone: (773) 830-5957 or (312) 660-1300

Email - Refugee & Immigrant Community Services:

[rics@heartlandalliance.org](mailto:rics@heartlandalliance.org)

Vocational & English Language Training: [velt@heartlandalliance.org](mailto:velt@heartlandalliance.org)

***JCFS/HIAS:***

Website: <https://www.jcfs.org/hiaswelcomecampaign>

<https://www.jcfs.org/refugeecosponsorship>

Phone: (312) 357-4666

Email: [ask@jcfs.org](mailto:ask@jcfs.org)

***RefugeeOne:***

Website: <https://www.refugeeone.org/afghanistan.html>

Phone: (773) 989-5647

Email: [info@refugeeone.org](mailto:info@refugeeone.org)

***World Relief (Chicago):***

Website: <https://worldrelief.org/chicagoland/get-involved/afghan-allies/>

Phone: (773) 583-9191

Email: [chicagoland@wr.org](mailto:chicagoland@wr.org)

**C. Current Cook County Role**

Along with the resettlement agencies, other local government bodies, and stakeholders, Cook County Government, through its Department of Emergency Management and Regional Security and Commission on Human Rights, attends bi-weekly meetings conducted by the Office of Welcoming Centers for Refugee and Immigrant Services. This ensures any specific asks of Cook County are efficiently communicated.

Cook County representatives have facilitated communications between County agencies and resettlement agencies. For example, recently, resettlement agencies have had critical issues in locating in-patient mental health services for unaccompanied minors. The County's Department of Public Health facilitated a

conversation between Heartland Human Care Services and the Refugee Immigrant Child Health Initiative of Illinois Chapter of the American Pediatric Association to brainstorm solutions and discuss available resources. In addition, the Department of Emergency Management and Regional Security procured temporary housing for Afghan refugees.

#### D. Further Actions & Specific Requests

This report and the path forward can set important standards for broader inclusion of all refugee and asylum-seeking populations in Cook County. It is critical to note that, in the preceding Hearing and all subsequent forums, there have been consistent requests for additional funding and resources. More funding and resources from federal and municipal governments are needed.

1. Specifically identified requests for support
  - a. **Craig Maki, CEO-Asian Human Services**  
Reconvene another hearing a year from now when there is less awareness and media coverage. There is often a greater need for emotional and long-term support a year after initial resettlement.
  - b. **Dr. Dilara Sayeed, President-IL Muslim Civic Coalition**
    - 1) Continue to seek a better understanding of all diverse communities in County and State
    - 2) Support legislation, advocate for marginalized communities
    - 3) Consistently provide support
  - c. **Jims Porter, Communications & Advocacy Manager-Refugee One**
    - 1) Safe affordable housing
    - 2) Education in the form of English classes
    - 3) Employment support
  - d. **Rachel Ruttenberg, Sr. Director of Policy-Heartland Alliance**
    - 1) More flexible resources for housing
    - 2) Resources for unaccompanied minors, including mental health services
  - e. **Lillian Jimenez, State Refugee Coordinator-Office of Welcoming Centers for Refugee and Immigrant Services**
    - 1) Legal Services for refugees
    - 2) Ongoing medical support for unaccompanied minors
    - 3) Continued collaboration between State, local governments, resettlement agencies, and the federal government
  - f. **Ahlam Jbarra, Deputy Director-Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights**
    - 1) Housing support

2. Specific areas to assist or volunteer:

- a. If you would like to provide a charitable donation, employment opportunity, housing, food, legal assistance or other assistance for the Afghan resettlement effort in Illinois, please contact one of the resettlement agencies or fill out this form from the Illinois Department of Human Services: [Afghanistan Refugee Support Form](#).
- b. Volunteer as a Child Advocate with the Young Center: <https://www.theyoungcenter.org/volunteer-at-the-young-center>.
- c. Donate time or resources in several ways with Welcome.US: <https://welcome.us/learn-more>.
- d. Several organizations provide cultural awareness trainings, bystander intervention trainings, and student counseling. One such organization, Healsters, is underwritten by Council on American-Islamic Relations Chicago (CAIR-Chicago). For more information or to schedule a training: <https://www.healsters.org/>.
- e. Cook County Commission on Human Rights is available to receive formal complaints from Afghan refugees who are the victims of hate crimes and discrimination: [File a Complaint for Unlawful Discrimination or Harassment](#). According to Cook County's Human Rights Ordinance, it is unlawful to discriminate against a person because of their "race, color, sex, age, religion, disability, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, marital status, parental status, military discharge status, source of income, gender identity or housing status; or the actual or perceived association with such a person."