



RASNZ

Refugee health
& wellbeing

**MENTAL HEALTH
SUPPORT FOR AFGHAN
WHĀNAU
HANDBOOK**

WHERE IS AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is a landlocked country at the crossroads of central and south Asia. It is bordered by Pakistan to the east and south, Iran to the west, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to the north, and Tajikistan and China to the northwest.

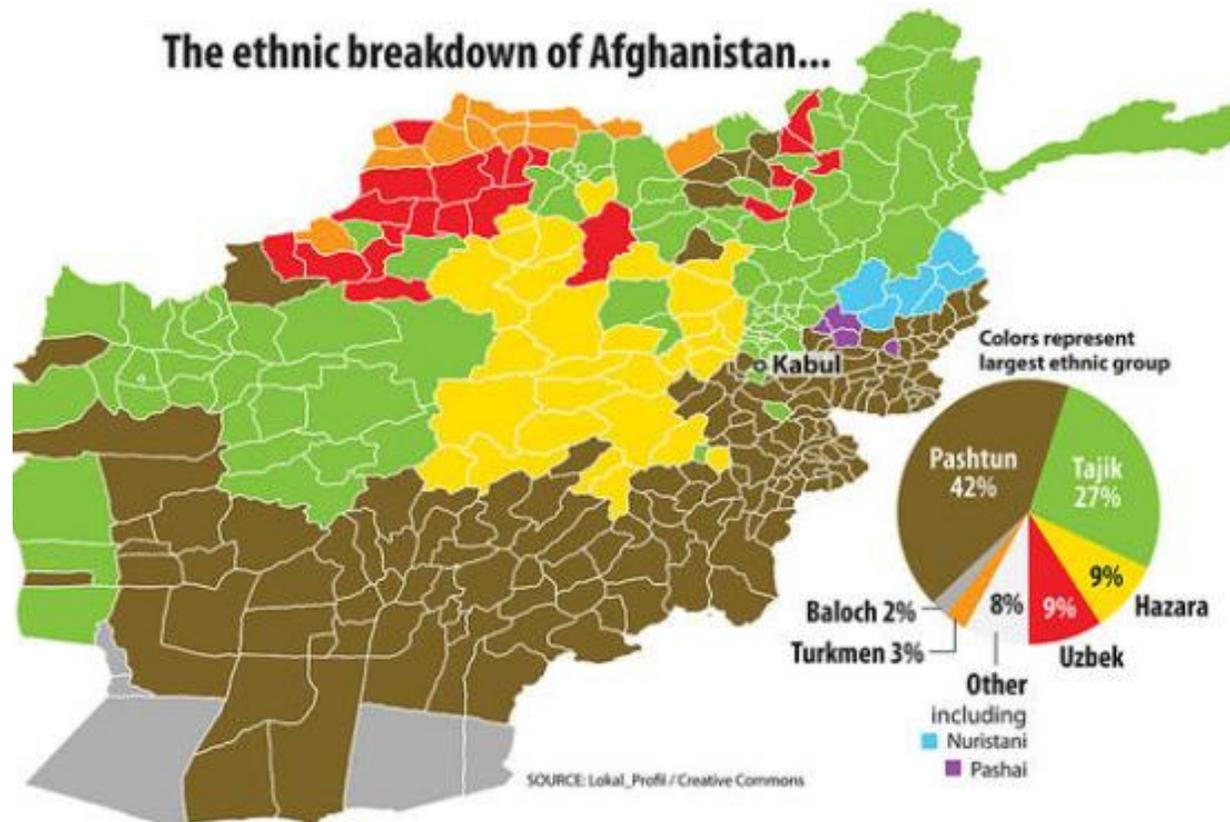
It has a population of 38 million (2019).

Most Afghans live in rural areas in tribal and kinship groups. Around 10 percent of the population live in the capital city of Kabul.

Kabul in 2015 had a population of 3 million.



THE ETHNIC BREAKDOWN

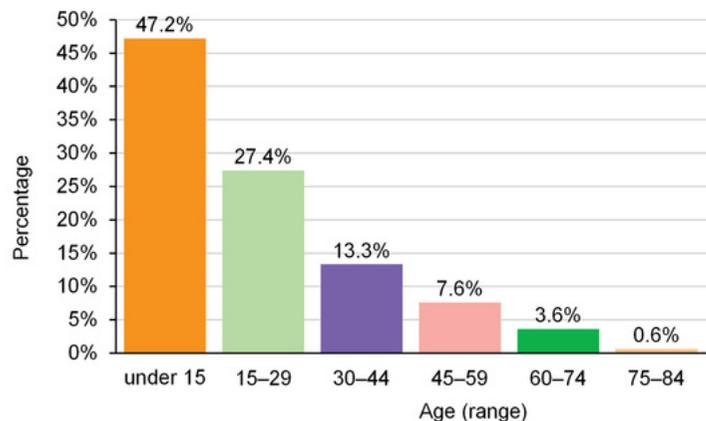


Islam is the religion of Afghans, There are both Sunni and Shia Muslims. There are many ethnic groups, Tajiks, Pashtuns, Hazarah, Uzbek, Aimaq, Turkman, Baloch and others.

99.7 percent of the population are Muslims. A minority are Sikh and Bahai.

The main languages spoken by Afghans are Dari and Pashto. A small minority who speak Uzbek.

Afghanistan age breakdown (2020–21)



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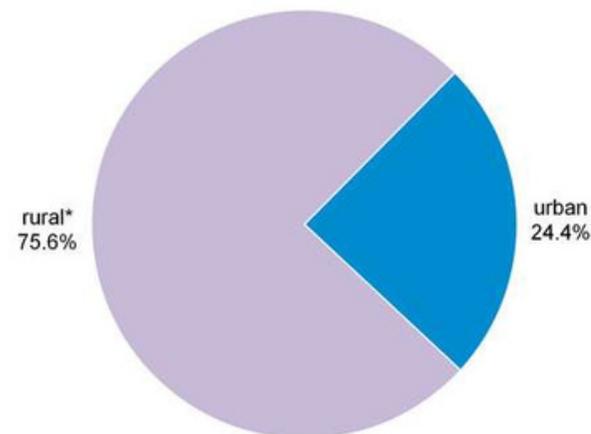
Literacy rate

According to the 2016 data, the literacy rate pre 2016 was 34% and it had increased to 43%.

The literacy rate increased substantially for youth aged 15–24 to 65%.

The literacy rate for men was 52% and for woman it was only 29%. Socioeconomic factors, security situations, social and cultural barriers are a few of the reasons why Afghans receive limited formal education.

Afghanistan urban-rural (2019-20)



Afghanistan BY THE NUMBERS

| Population | Percentage of Population Under 25 | Literacy Rates | Per Capita GDP | Life Expectancy |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 36.5 Million | 63% | Male: 52% | \$2,000 | 52.1 years |
| (U.S.: 328 million) | (U.S.: 32%) | Female: 24% | (U.S.: \$59,800) | (U.S.: 80.1 years) |
| | | (U.S.: 99%) | | |

SOURCES: 2018 WORLD POPULATION DATA SHEET (POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU), WORLD FACTBOOK (C.I.A.)

FAMILY DYNAMICS

Family roles vary between ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses and regions. Nevertheless, a traditional patriarchal hierarchy prevails throughout all. The eldest male has the most authority and decision-making power and usually controls all family spending. Every decision has to be approved by the husband or father.

Men carry the economic burden of the family and often have to single-handedly support the entire household. For a husband and father in Afghanistan, this can mean having to earn enough to support himself, his wife, his children and any parent or in-law living with the nuclear family. Brothers and sons must also help to economically support the family, protect the family honour and discipline any misbehaviour.

Women are largely in charge of the domestic chores, cooking, raising the children, entertaining guests and catering to the needs of the man of the house. It is seen as the woman's duty to ensure guests are properly entertained and catered to in the most hospitable way the household can afford. The senior woman will also be in charge of portioning a family's supply of food for the year.

Children are to show reverence and deference to their parents and elders. Disobedience of an elder's words is seen as extremely disrespectful and punishable behaviour. This expectation of social compliance loosens as people gain adult independence. However, even at a mature age, an Afghan is expected to respect their parents' wishes and take advice from those older than them.

The Afghan educational system is limited, especially for those living rurally. Many young children learn entirely from the village mosque and religious leader (*mullah*), or their parents (usually the mother while the father works). This supports the cultural idea that parents are to be revered for their wisdom and mothers should be greatly admired.



PREVALENCE OF WAR AND TRAUMA

- **SOVIET-AFGHAN WAR -24 DEC 1979 – 15 FEB 1989**
- **CIVIL WAR, MUJAHIDEEN-TALIBAN PHASE (1992-2001)**
- **2001-2021 (KARZAI AND GHANI'S GOVERNMENT)**
- **AUGUST 2021-TALIBAN**

Three decades of war, most Afghans have experienced the destruction of their country's economic and social, and cultural infrastructure, forcing them to live through challenging conditions on daily basis.

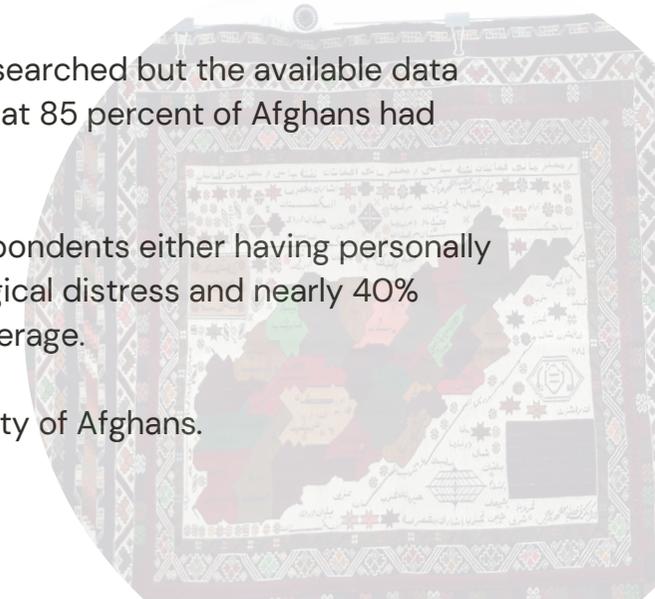
So it is important to understand the mental health of Afghans prior to their evacuation now and in the past, as their trauma is complex and multiple.

Many generations of Afghans have been born during the conflict and some have never known peace. Many Afghans have experienced violence, losing loved ones, sustaining war injury, becoming refugees or internally displaced, being separated from family members, all of which are traumatic experiences and inevitably have mental health impacts.

There is limited data on the mental health of Afghans, indeed it is an area that is insufficiently researched but the available data reflects a highly traumatized population. A survey by the European Commission in 2018 found that 85 percent of Afghans had witness at least one traumatic event.

A nation-wide study that was published in 2021 found high exposure to trauma, with 86% of respondents either having personally experienced or witnessed at least one traumatic event in their lives. 47% experienced psychological distress and nearly 40% grappled with substantial mental health impairment, with women suffering more than men on average.

Availability and accessibility to mental health services was and still remains a problem for majority of Afghans.



TRAUMA AND EVACUATION - LOSS AND GRIEF

For those in the diaspora who arrive in host countries having escaped their war torn homeland, the long term effects of trauma continue to manifest in heightened stress and survival responses.

Research into intergenerational stress has found that descendants of Holocaust survivors exhibited changes in stress hormone levels, suggesting a change in their genetic makeup.

This may mean that even before children are born, they can be affected by the stressful experiences their parents and grandparents have lived through.

Even when the threat is over, once they've resettled in a safe country, the body does not return to baseline (un-stressed state) and the traumatic stress response leads to physical and psychological issues for several generations.

**BARRIERS TO ACCESS MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT INCLUDES:
LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES, LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION ABOUT
MENTAL HEALTH, FEAR OF JUDGEMENT BY THE COMMUNITY AND COMMON
MYTHS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS.**



RESILIENCE FACTORS - POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH

- Strong Faith - This is the foundation for healing for many families, going to the mosque and finding strength in their faith is common.
- Family connectedness - Phone calls, video calls and generally staying socially connected with family and friends is central to everyday life.
- Poetry and Dance - Families may use poetry and dance as a way to express themselves, connect with each other and their traditions.
- Food - Finding enjoyment cooking and sharing meals is also common in Afghan families.



**Always remember
people from
Afghanistan have
strengths and coping
strategies and are
often already using
them**

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON FEELINGS AND BEHAVIORS WHEN CRISES HITS BACK HOME?

- Disbelief and shock
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Disorientation
- Difficulty making decisions or concentrating
- Difficulty focusing
- Apathy and emotional numbing
- Irritability and anger
- Sadness and depression
- Feeling powerless
- Extreme changes in eating patterns
- Loss of appetite or overeating
- Crying for no apparent reason
- Headaches and stomach problems
- Difficulty sleeping

THESE REACTIONS ARE **NORMAL** RESPONSES TO AN UNUSUAL SITUATION



HOW CAN WE SUPPORT WHĀNAU?

Remind people that the reactions they may be experiencing are natural responses which anyone in similar circumstances might experience. People say that they are relieved when you can put matters into perspective for them by telling them that the responses they are experiencing are natural / normal responses to extreme events.

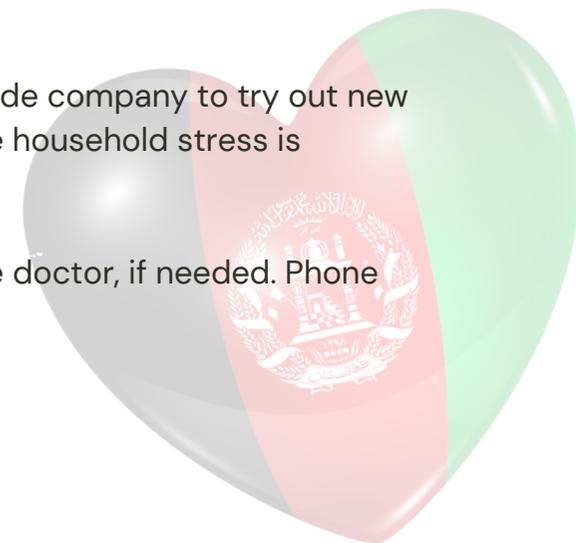
Be aware that some people do not experience these responses, they may develop later or manifest in unusual ways. Children and young people for example often present with physical issues such as rashes, fever, toileting issues and appetite loss.

This a time for all of us to listen actively with our ears and hearts. You will all have heard about using an empathetic approach, stepping into someone's shoes. Develop a calm trusting rapport with the person or family and pause in readiness for the conversation, step into your own shoes first to check your own biases and role and role parameters, consider confidentiality. Then step into the person shoes, metaphorically lean in, and listen. Validate emotions and recognise that people have amazing inner resources and resiliency. **Sprint forward with compassion, walk toward advice.**

Maintaining Social connections and keeping usual routines can bring stability and equilibrium to a person's day. Connecting with others is important for emotional wellbeing and helps us to feel safer, less isolated, and alone.

Friendships can bring joy, laughter and positivity, innovative ideas, bring children together and provide company to try out new activities and develop new projects. Often adults under this kind of stress might not realise how the household stress is affecting children, encouraging connection is helpful.

Encourage people to keep taking medications if prescribed and do not hesitate to check in with the doctor, if needed. Phone calls to the doctor can be commonplace these days.



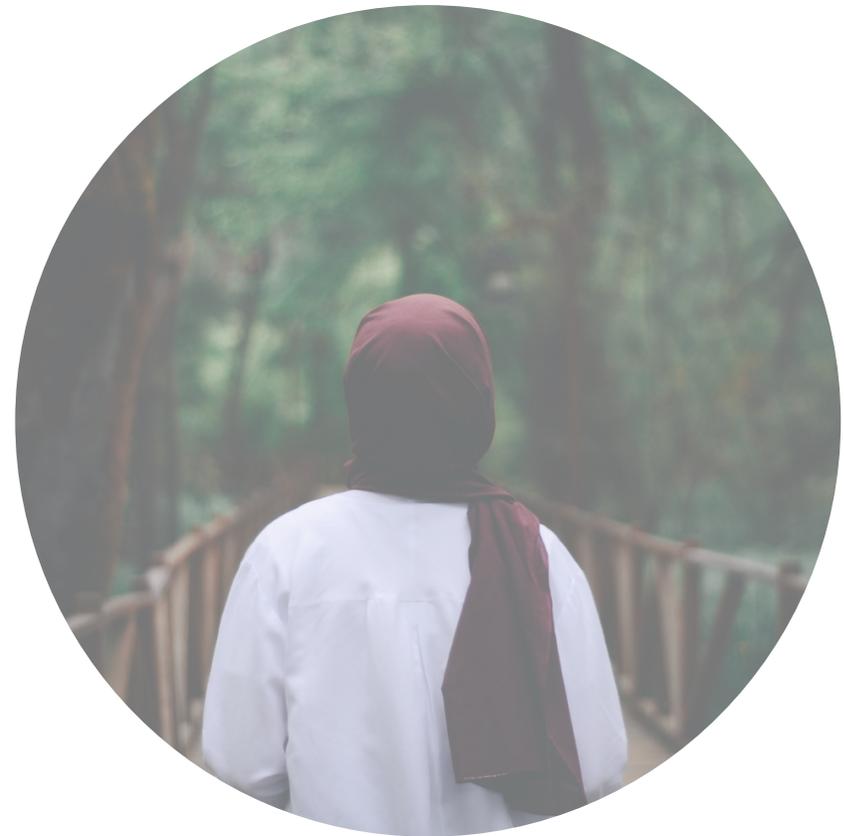
PRACTICAL REMINDERS

- Take Care of Your Body
 - Try to eat healthy
 - Exercise regularly
 - Get plenty of sleep
 - Avoid alcohol and other drug
- Connect and share your feelings with a friend or family member
- Maintain relationships and rely on your support system.
- Take Breaks and make time to unwind.
- Try to return to activities that you enjoy.
- Limit your exposure to news (*stay Informed and watch for news updates from reliable officials however, avoid excessive exposure to media coverage of the event*).
- Ask for Help



WHEN SHOULD WHĀNAU SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP?

- Continued difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- Experiencing nightmares, flashbacks that interfere with their functioning
- Unable to function as they used to prior to the incident
- Constantly thinking about the Afghanistan and not being able to disconnect their thoughts
- Experiencing high level of anger that might be harmful to themselves, family or others



SUPPORT SERVICES FOR AFGHAN COMMUNITIES IN AOTEAROA

FOR MENTAL HEALTH, WELLBEING, AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

FROM ANYWHERE IN THE COUNTRY, CALL OR TEXT 1737

1737 is a free service for people feeling down, anxious, a bit overwhelmed or who just need to chat to someone. You can call or text them for free 24/7 and talk to (or text with) a trained counsellor or talk to a peer support worker. **Interpreters in Farsi, Dari and Pashto are available on request**

In Auckland

Refugee as Survivors New Zealand

rasnz.co.nz – 09) 620 2252

Refugee as Survivors New Zealand is New Zealand's leading mental health and wellbeing service for people from refugee backgrounds living in Aotearoa.

Kāhui Tū Kaha

kahuitukaha.co.nz – [0800 559 592]

Kāhui Tū Kaha is a not-for-profit provider of housing and mental health services. Social workers, counsellors and specialist Mental Health staff are available. They are a Ngāti Whātua organization and have experience working with Afghan and Muslim communities.

Starship Community – Child Development Service

<https://www.ecald.com/resources/migrant-and-refugee-services/starship-community-child-development-service/>

The Starship Community Child Development Service provides cultural caseworkers and child disability services for groups from Asian, refugee and migrant backgrounds.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR AFGHAN COMMUNITIES IN AOTEAROA

Starship Community – Regional Refugee Community Health Worker Team

<https://www.ecald.com/resources/migrant-and-refugee-services/regional-refugee-community-health-worker-team-starship-community/>

Starship Community Service mental health and well-being support to people from refugee backgrounds (including asylum seekers) through the co-ordination of health and related services that impact on their health and well-being.

In Hamilton

Diversity Counselling New Zealand

dcnz.net – [021 0262 5587]

Diversity Counselling New Zealand (DCNZ) offers culturally responsive counselling and psychological services to all communities, including migrants and former refugees (all age groups, all genders). Farsi and Dari interpreters available.

In Wellington

Refugee Trauma Recovery (RTR)

Francesca.Faggioli@redcross.org.nz – [04 805 0353]

RTR provides clinical and therapeutic support to former refugees who have experienced torture and/or trauma. Farsi and Dari interpreters available

ChangeMakers Resettlement Forum

<https://crf.org.nz/contact/> – [04 801 5812]

A grassroots non-governmental organisation (NGO) representing 17+ refugee background communities in the greater Wellington region offering various community development activities.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR AFGHAN COMMUNITIES IN AOTEAROA

In Palmerston North

ACROSS Te Kotahitanga O te Wairua

<http://www.across.org.nz/> – [0800 227 677]

ACROSS is staffed by both social workers and counsellors who provide a range of services to children and families. (Counselling and mental health support for Afghan families available.)

YOSS

<http://www.yoss.org.nz/counselling.html> – [06 355 5906]

YOSS provides youth-friendly, non-judgemental, confidential, and free counselling for people between the age of 10-24.

Parentline Manawatu

<https://www.parentlinemanawatu.org.nz/> – [0800 432 6459]

Parentline offers counselling and parenting groups and are committed to promoting healthy family relationships.

Manline

<https://www.manline.co.nz/> – [063581211]

Manline provides counselling and mental health services to men in an individual, whanau or community context.

Manawatu Multicultural Council

<https://www.mmcnz.org.nz/home> – [+64 6 358 1572]

MMC provides information, advice, support and education to the multicultural community.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR AFGHAN COMMUNITIES IN AOTEAROA

In Christchurch

Christchurch Resettlement Services

<https://crs.org.nz/> – [022 658 5068 (During lockdown only) /03 335 0311 ext 22 (After lockdown)]

They provide counselling support services for migrants and former refugees.

Purapura Whetu

<https://www.pw.maori.nz/> – [Free helpline 0800 4 WHETU (94388) is available Mon to Fri 8:30am–4:30pm]

Purapura Whetu provides Mental Health and Social Support Services (including Muslim Wellbeing Services)

St John of God Hauora Trust

<http://www.sjog.org.nz/our-services/community-youth-and-child-services>

Phone: 03-386 2159

St John of God Hauora Trust provides supportive and person-centred care to people living with a disability as well as vulnerable children, young people and families through our Health and Ability and Community, Youth and Child Services.

In Ashburton

Safer Mid Canterbury

kathy.harrington-watt@safer.org.nz – [027 296 0003]

Safer Mid provides free and confidential community services for the Ashburton community, such as supporting vulnerable families and working with children, youth justice and adult offenders, former refugees (including Afghan families) and new migrants.

In Otago

WellSouth Mental Health and Wellbeing

<https://wellsouth.nz/community/mh-concerns/> – [Freephone for Dunedin: 0800477115 / Freephone for Invercargill: 032146436]

WellSouth provides a diverse range of mental health service for individuals and families experiencing mental health difficulties

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR AFGHAN COMMUNITIES IN AOTEAROA

FOR FAMILY RESTORATION

New Zealand Red Cross

<https://www.redcross.org.nz/> – [0800 RED CROSS (733 2767)]

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are responding by assisting the wounded and disabled, making prison visits, helping detainees maintain contact with their families, supporting hospitals, preventing violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and supporting the Afghan Red Crescent.

Restoring Family Links

If contact has been lost with family members in Afghanistan please call Restoring Family Links at 0800 733 2767 or email familylinks@redcross.org.nz

FOR CURRENT ADVICE ON THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

The situation in Afghanistan is highly uncertain and changing rapidly.

If family members remain in Afghanistan and are eligible to travel to New Zealand or have applied for a visa to travel to New Zealand:

Contact MFAT Consular Services: <https://safetravel.govt.nz/contact> **0800 30 10 30** and/or cons@mfat.govt.nz

If the family members in Afghanistan are neither New Zealand citizens or permanent residents contact should be made with Immigration New Zealand and visas must be applied for through the normal processes.

<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/>

<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/contact>

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR AFGHAN COMMUNITIES IN AOTEAROA

FOR ASSOCIATIONS AND COUNCILS SUPPORTING MUSLIMS AND AFGHAN COMMUNITIES

Umma Trust

ummatrust.co.nz – [09 815 0153]

Umma Trust works mainly with Muslim women in Auckland. They provide support and resources for refugee, migrant and Muslim families. They also support families with Halal emergency food parcels.

New Zealand National Refugee Association

facebook.com/NZNationalRefugeeAssociation

The New Zealand National Refugee Association motivates, assists, and connects refugee families using rights and needs-based strategies.

Asylum Seeker Support Trust

aucklandrefugeecouncil.org – [09 378 7434]

The Asylum Seeker Support Trust works to create a New Zealand where Asylum Seekers and Convention Refugees are welcomed, supported and thriving.

New Settlers Family and Community Trust

<https://www.nfact.co.nz/>

022 655 4062

NFACT will support new settlers to New Zealand, especially those from refugee and refugee-like backgrounds,. Where appropriate, we seek to provide services by refugees for refugees.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR AFGHAN COMMUNITIES IN AOTEAROA

FOR ASSOCIATIONS AND COUNCILS SUPPORTING MUSLIMS AND AFGHAN COMMUNITIES

Islamic Council of New Zealand

iconz.org – [021 234 7168]

The Islamic Council of New Zealand is a faith-based organisation which represents the Muslim communities that follow the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) and his Ahlul-Bayt [Prophetic progeny] (PBUTH).

Islamic Women's Council of New Zealand

iwcnz.org.nz/contact – [021 0293 6557]

The Islamic Women's Council of New Zealand is providing support to Afghani women. They are a national organisation based in Hamilton, with reach in Auckland, Wellington

United Afghan Association of Canterbury

facebook.com/uaac.nz – uaac.nz@gmail.com

The United Afghan Association of Canterbury provides support and information to the Afghan community.

The Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand

fianz.com– [04 387 8023]

The Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand is a federation of several regional New Zealand Muslim associations. They provide Islamic communities and centres of worship with support, so they are able to integrate well with the mainstream New Zealand community.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR AFGHAN COMMUNITIES IN AOTEAROA

FOR ASSOCIATIONS AND COUNCILS SUPPORTING MUSLIMS AND AFGHAN COMMUNITIES

Afghan Association of New Zealand

afghanistan.org.nz

The Afghan Association of New Zealand is the oldest and largest established Afghan organisation that represents the Afghan Diaspora of New Zealand. They help Afghan communities adapt, integrate and become active members of the wider New Zealand society and economy.

The Otago Muslim Association

<https://www.otagomuslim.com/>

Established in 1995, the OMA caters for the needs of the growing numbers of Muslims permanently residing in the city of Dunedin and the provincial regions of Otago and Southland. Contact: <https://www.otagomuslim.com/contact-us>

Further Reading

A national survey on depressive and anxiety disorders in Afghanistan: A highly traumatized population | BMC Psychiatry | Full Text:

<https://bmcp psychiatry.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12888-021-03273-4>

Alemi Q, James S, Cruz R, Zepeda V, Racadio M. (2014). Psychological distress in Afghan refugees: a mixed-method systematic review. *J Immigr Minor Health*, 16(6) 1247–61. doi: 10.1007/s10903-013-9861-1. PMID: 23784146; PMCID: PMC3912229.

Slewa-Younan, S., Rioseco, P., Guajardo, M., & Mond, J. (2019). Predictors of professional help-seeking for emotional problems in Afghan and Iraqi refugees in Australia: findings from the Building a New Life in Australia Database. *BMC public health*, 19(1), 1485. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-7673-5>

Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson (2012). "Thinking Too Much": Psychological distress, sources of stress and coping strategies of resettled Afghan and Kurdish refugees. *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, VI (2) 63–86.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.10381607.0006.205>



RASNZ
Refugee health
& wellbeing

Refugees as Survivors New Zealand (RASNZ) is New Zealand's leading mental health and wellbeing service for people from refugee backgrounds living in Aotearoa.

Every day, people around the world are forced to flee their homes, families and communities in order to protect their own lives and those of their loved ones. Traumatic events can impact refugees' health and initial settlement in New Zealand. RASNZ works to address these issues by providing holistic mental health and wellbeing support throughout each person's journey.

Our Values

Integrity, Compassion, Respect and Responsibility

Our Vision

... that all former refugee and asylum seekers have access to integrated, culturally informed mental health and wellbeing services.

RASNZ Mangere
251 Massey Road
Mangere East
Auckland 2024
Phone (09) 270 0870

RASNZ Community Clinical Team
173 Captain Springs Road
Onehunga
Auckland 1061
Phone (09) 620 2252

RASNZ Youth
1222a Dominion Road
Mt Roskill
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