

# 3 Ways You Can Help Afghan Refugees Rebuild Their Lives, According to an Afghan

By Susanna Cole



The refugee compound in Abu Dhabi, taken by Shararah.

Most Americans are no strangers to the news that when the U.S. military pulled out of Afghanistan last summer, they left a slew of ruined lives in their wake. As the Taliban rolled into Kabul, a [rushed evacuation](#) of Afghan Allies and endangered minorities left many families separated from one another, stranded in refugee compounds, or sloppily “resettled” without

much financial assistance or reassurance that their visas would last longer than a year. Most remain in Kabul today.

To gain a greater understanding of the situation surrounding Afghans, I recently interviewed (via phone) a refugee resettling in Germany. For her safety, I'll call her Shararah, which means "a woman who is like a burning flame"—a name I think you'll find fitting when you hear her story.

## Shararah's Story: The Problem

A twenty-five-year-old medical student busy with final exams, Shararah delayed her evacuation to finish her degree as the Taliban took over Kabul. "I could hear fire and the noise of horror around the city... Everybody was running," she told me. Weeks later, she and half her family fled, traveling through multiple Taliban checkpoints to escape. The other half of her family—three younger sisters and her father—were unable to evacuate and remain in Kabul today. "Nobody could sleep the night before we left because we were leaving our home—my sisters."

Her family was among [10,000 Afghans evacuated to Abu Dhabi](#). Shararah lived there for 136 days and volunteered as a women's mental health counselor to help her fellow Afghans. On February 16<sup>th</sup>—three weeks ago—she and her family flew to Germany, where they must now rebuild their lives. Their first obstacles are learning German and having enough food to put on the table—but they don't have a table.

The situation for the more than [100,000 Afghans](#) transitioning out of refugee compounds is challenging, to say the least. However, it is by no means hopeless. **There are several important ways you can help.**

## **Donate**

You can donate money or material goods. Refugees looking to resettle often arrive with next to nothing. If you have it, they could likely use it. Of course, there's the obvious: bedding, clothes, coats, supplies for families with babies, etc. But there are some things you might not think of. Old computers and cell phones would help refugees attain jobs and navigate through unfamiliar cities. Not sure where to donate? Loads of NGOs have whole sections on their websites dedicated to helping Afghan refugees rebuild their lives.

Here are just a few: [HIAS](#), [Save the Children](#), [International Rescue Committee](#), [World Relief](#).

## **Sponsor a Refugee Family**

One of the most impactful ways you can help Afghan refugees is by sponsoring their resettlement in your community. Though this may seem daunting at first, with a group of four friends or an entire club or religious congregation working with you, it's more than possible. Nearly all the resettlement agencies listed above (under "Donate") provide these options, as well as Samaritan's Purse, a front-runner in information gathering on this topic. [Click here](#) for their factsheet on refugee sponsorship.

## **Get Informed**

Because refugee programs differ by geographical location, one of the best ways you can help is by simply googling: "How can I help Afghan refugees in [insert your city]." A list of resettlement agencies will pop up with practical ways you can help, specific to your area.

If you live within the U.S., you can begin by reading this list of [Resettlement Agencies](#).

## Final Thoughts

It can be easy to feel overwhelmed when the need is so great. But the reality is that helping people restore their lives is well within reach. You can donate five dollars or volunteer a few hours of your time at a resettlement agency.

When asked how people could help her family, Shararah replied, “Last week we visited my uncle who was warmly welcomed [by people in his community]. Some people provided them with a home and things like carpets and toys for their children. But it’s not about that stuff. It’s all about love. [It’s about] people knocking on your door and saying, ‘[You’re] welcome here.’ When someone smiles at you, it’s everything.”

Shararah is currently working hard to learn the German language, with dreams of resuming her medical studies and returning to Afghanistan as a cardiothoracic surgeon. “I want to go back someday and prove that women—girls—can do anything.”

If one thing was made clear by my conversation with Shararah, it’s that Afghans are motivated and working hard to help themselves. They just need a little help.

The biggest mistake you can make right now is allow the magnitude of the situation to scare you into inaction. Don’t be overwhelmed. Restoration is within reach.