

Afghan Evacuees Arriving in Boston



Friendly Handshake – Taken by the U.S. Army

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On Aug. 27, 2021, Frozan Kazimi fled Afghanistan, her homeland. — the day after an ISIS suicide bomber killed 13 U.S. service members and 170 Afghans at the Kabul airport.

It was a crazy day, the U.S. was pulling out its troops and the Taliban's presence was growing stronger. Despite the difficulty of leaving one's home country, the increasing attacks in larger cities left no other option.

There was no security for Afghanistan and its citizens. The only way was to escape as quickly as possible. As a woman in her 30s who has lived in Afghanistan all her life, she was forced to leave everything behind and only bring items of utmost importance in her suitcase.

The only thing on Kazimi's mind was arriving in a new world with her husband.

Kazimi worked for the U.S. Embassy while she lived in Afghanistan, which made her a potential target of the Taliban, making it easier for her to come to the United States. Her journey began in Kuwait where she boarded a plane that arrived at Fort McCoy, a Wisconsin Army Base. She was able to do this through the Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Center, a U.S. organization. Her final destination would be Boston.

Since Kazimi had arrived with her husband, it made the transition and resettling much easier. However, she can't help but think about her mother, father, and five sisters who are still in Afghanistan with no way out. Due to the U.S.'s pull-out. It is difficult to get them into the United States, as there is no military assistance. However, Kazimi has hope. She's currently getting her permanent residency, also known as a green card, which will allow her to get a U.S. passport and help her family resettle in the United States.

Afghan evacuees are far from their loved ones and are trying to get their families out of Afghanistan and into the United States. The process can take up to years. They need a special visa that will allow them to stay in the United States for a longer period.

The [U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#) has stated that "...about 40% will eventually qualify for a special immigrant visa, a lengthy and complex process that ultimately provides a permanent legal residency and a path to residency." However, because this process takes so long, there's an immediate need for an expedition in this process to get Afghan citizens into the United States where they can resettle safely.

Afghan refugees are struggling to resettle in the Boston area after abruptly leaving their homeland. Due to the end of a 20-year war that began when the U.S. invaded in 2001, ostensibly looking for Osama bin Laden, the alleged mastermind of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The U. S. left Afghanistan and said it believed that the United States government had accomplished its mission 10 years ago with the assassination of Osama bin Laden.

"With the terror threat now in many places, keeping thousands of troops grounded and concentrated in just one country and across the billions (of dollars spent) each year makes little sense to me and to our leaders," President Joe Biden stated in his announcement to withdraw U.S. military in Afghanistan.

But the people do not trust the government as the government has continually failed its citizens in the past. This made Afghanistan weak allowing for the Taliban and their fighters to move in from the suburbs and Pakistan to take over larger cities and the government as a whole.

Those left behind are risking their lives every day. The Taliban's takeover has caused a large economic crisis with millions of dollars in lost income as well as limited access to food, water,

and healthcare. Not to mention, the continuation of attacking major cities, leaving people's lives at risk. Additionally, under the Taliban, women are limited to healthcare and have strong restrictions regarding higher education as well as what they wear, who they talk to, and how they travel.

More recently, the issue is the United States pull out of Afghanistan and how it has affected the loved ones of those who have resettled in the U.S. Kazimi reflects on her family in Afghanistan and says "...yes, no there is no chance. I can't even fight for them here. I need to get my passport and green card in order to even get my mother in the United States."

The history between the United States and Afghanistan continues to affect its people today. Especially the difficulty with getting temporary protected status, TPS or temporary protected status is a temporary status given by the United States government to eligible nationals of designated countries that are determined by the Department of Homeland Security.

Jeff Theilman, the president of the International Institute of New England, an agency that resettles refugees pointed out there were about 80,000 people evacuated from Afghanistan last summer. Of those 80,000 about 2,000 of them reside in Massachusetts. "Specifically, they are placed in apartments and homes as far south as New Bedford and as far north as Haverhill and Newburyport in Massachusetts," Thielman said.

Kazimi's family is from Kabul. When she entered the U.S., she applied for her green card and submitted the I-485 form, which is an application to register permanent residence. Kazimi was interviewed in Afghanistan, which expedited her process to enter the United States.

"When we were in Afghanistan I worked for the U.S. Embassy for almost seven years and when the Afghanistan government began to collapse and the Taliban began to take over at the time, we received emails to evacuate the area immediately. We tried three times to go to the airport but we could not. On August 27th, we were finally able to get through the airport, waited for three hours, and then got on a plane to Kuwait where we went to Washington, D.C. and spent a few days there and then arrived in Wisconsin."

Kazimi recalls that "it was too hard to adjust in that situation" of living on a military base. Those weeks were difficult because they were constantly moving and living in a shared space.

However, since arriving in Boston in December, Kazimi has found peace with her husband.

Kazimi has loved the new culture she is adapting to. People are so kind and appreciative. Additionally, she is working for the International Institute of New England as a representative for Afghan evacuees and helping them with the process of entering the United States. She believes

that a more reformed relationship between the Taliban and the United States is detrimental to helping more Afghans enter the United States. However, humanitarian parole has helped those who are desperately trying to leave their country.

“When it comes to the steps taken when arriving in the United States, there are multiple factors to consider. Theilman explained that the U.S. State Department gets in contact with the evacuees, about 75,000 people. Then the U.S. department contacts nine voluntary agencies. We have people in contact with our partners USCRI where they assign people to us, and we go to the airport and pick them up.”

After picking them up from the airport, the resettlement agency helps them by providing housing, schooling, money, and even jobs. The case management team at IINE helps with the process of housing, education, and healthcare.

There’s a formal program called reception and placement, a 90-day federal program that IINE administers. However, after the 90-days IINE still helps out those who are resettling.

“There’s a matching grant program that helps people save money, and there's still case management, as well as state money that is distributed anywhere between a 2-7 month period of time,” Thielman said. “When it all works out, our relationship with these families can be up to five years. We are all they got in a lot of ways, as they try to navigate a new country, so we try to be there as much as possible.”

As far as COVID goes, refugees who have arrived in the United States are usually vaccinated on U.S. military bases when they are waiting to be sent to a different city to therefore completely resettle and start their new life. However, there have been outbreaks within these military bases which then elongates the process of trying to place Afghans into a more permanent city where they can begin to work and fully start their resettlement.

People who have families and also work for the government have helped the United States by putting their lives in danger in Afghanistan. This also affects those living in Boston because there’s a need for certain resources to be provided to those evacuees who are arriving. This includes transportation, food, money, school, and even housing. Therefore, people living in the local area must work with organizations to ensure a smooth transition for those arriving from Afghanistan to help them resettle into the United States and more specifically, in this case, Boston, Massachusetts.

Kazimi’s new life in Boston consists of learning more about the culture every day. Since she works with IINE she is constantly helping other Afghan evacuees arrive in the United States and desperately trying to find solutions in order to help those families out, as well as trying to help

her own family who is still struggling to find a way to the United States to escape the humanitarian crisis.