



# Responding to the Unique Needs of Unaccompanied Afghan Children

In the two years since the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban, Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) has responded to the unique needs of unaccompanied and separated Afghan children in the United States to ensure their safety and protection.

Although shielded from the Taliban, these children's path to permanent legal status and reunification with loved ones is fraught with challenges and uncertainty. Their ongoing legal cases are complex and have required KIND staff to research new areas of law to give our clients the best chance to remain in safety in the United States and reunify with their families.

Most of KIND's Afghan clients are seeking asylum because their family members are targets of the Taliban for their work with the United States government. Many are winning their cases thanks to the children's ability to tell their harrowing stories and the dedication of the KIND staff who have researched their cases tirelessly and argued new issues and points of law. KIND is also advocating forcefully for family reunification, assisting the children in the complex process of requesting that their families in danger be relocated to the United States. Additional ways we are helping unaccompanied Afghan children include:

## Legal rights and representation

- Providing Know Your Rights presentations to Afghan children at Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) shelters which KIND serves.
- Working with local refugee resettlement agencies to help children access benefits for which they are eligible with or without documentation as some do not have their birth certificate due to their chaotic departure from Kabul.

## Advocacy and policy

- Working to ensure that Afghan children continue to receive benefits for refugee children.
- Pressing the U.S. government to meet its commitment to reunify all separated Afghan children with their parents or guardians.

## Psychosocial, health, education, and integration assistance

- Connecting Afghan children to vital health and social services, and assisting them with integration as they navigate language and cultural challenges
- Assisting children with school enrollment and accessing educational resources such as GED study materials
- Partnering with child psychiatry and play therapy experts to facilitate individual and group therapy to help children with the anxiety, worry, and guilt they feel about their parents and siblings who remain behind in Afghanistan and the uncertainty of when they will see them again
- Providing interpreters who speak Dari or Pashto to ensure that children have access to services in their language.

Header image: A girl from Afghanistan waits at the US airbase for her departure to the US. Photo by Boris Roessler/picture alliance via Getty Images

## Afghan Children Alone in the United States

Of the approximately 1,500 Afghan children who were separated from their families at the Kabul airport in the chaos of the evacuation and flown to safety in the United States in 2021, about 90 percent remain separated from their parents who remain abroad, primarily in Afghanistan.

Children separated from their parents or caregivers were deemed “Unaccompanied Afghan Minors” and entitled to the same benefits available to unaccompanied refugee children, such as medical care and other vital social services —except that they had no permanent legal status. Many of KIND’s clients are pursuing asylum applications and some have already received asylum. Those who have not yet received asylum are eligible for re-parole for an additional two years.

### Pathway to Citizenship Through the Afghan Adjustment Act

KIND continues to urge the passage of the bipartisan Afghan Adjustment Act (AAA), first introduced in 2022 and reintroduced in June 2023. Supporters are pressing for its passage during Congress’ fall 2023 session. The AAA would provide lawful permanent resident status and a path to citizenship to Afghan allies who were relocated to the United States after the fall of Kabul and allow Afghans paroled into the United States, including unaccompanied children, to apply for a green card through simplified procedures. For some KIND clients, this option may allow them to bypass reliving traumatic experiences that form the basis of an asylum application and interview. It will also eliminate the need to seek re-parole and reduce possible interruptions in work authorization.

### Unaccompanied Afghan Children in Europe

KIND supports our European partners’ programming, advocacy, and coordination efforts that address transnational challenges of reunifying separated Afghan children with their families. Since KIND’s work in Europe began in 2019, Afghanistan has consistently been the top country of origin of unaccompanied children served by KIND and its nongovernmental partners in Europe. Of the children who have accessed legal assistance through KIND’s partners in Ireland, France, Italy, and Greece, 33 percent are from Afghanistan. KIND’s partners are helping them apply for asylum, family reunification, residence permits, and citizenship, and with the age assessment process.

### KIND helps three Afghan siblings gain asylum

Growing up in Afghanistan, Morsal and her family opposed the oppression and politics of the Taliban. M was outraged at their treatment of girls and women and dreamed of becoming a doctor.

After Afghanistan fell to the Taliban in August 2021, M, then 16, and her family fled to the Kabul airport along with thousands of others to try to escape the country. In the chaos at the airport, she and two of her younger brothers, then 14 and 13 years old, were separated from the rest of the family and ended up on a plane to Qatar where they spent more than two months in refugee camps before being flown to the United States.

M’s father, mother, and four other siblings did not make it out and remained in Afghanistan. M and her two brothers were sent to an ORR shelter in Atlanta, where they remained for several months. The children received Know Your Rights presentations from KIND, and a KIND staff attorney began representing them in their asylum cases. In a fortunate turn of events, their family was later evacuated from Afghanistan, and M and her siblings were eventually reunited with them after 16 months apart. The siblings won their asylum case this summer. They are adjusting to life in the United States and working hard in school. M is finishing high school and determined to advocate for girls’ and women’s rights.

## Young Afghan Girl Finds Safety with KIND's Help

T was 15 when she fled Afghanistan on an evacuation flight to the United States after the Taliban took control of the country in August 2021. She was separated from her mother and two sisters at the Kabul airport after the Taliban beat her mother to prevent the family from crossing into the U.S.-controlled part of the airport. After she arrived in the United States, T was held in ORR custody for two months before being released to a non-parental relative and referred to KIND. KIND matched T with a team of attorneys from Alston & Bird who helped her apply for asylum based on the persecution she experienced.

T's father was murdered when she was a baby; the Taliban is suspected to have killed him. She and her two sisters were raised by their mother, who taught the girls to be independent and to push back on traditional women's roles in Afghanistan.

The family clashed often with an uncle who supported the Taliban and condemned their independence. As Afghanistan was falling to the Taliban, T's uncle came to her mother and said he was going to force T and her sisters to marry members of the Taliban. T, her mother, and sisters went to the airport to try to flee the country. After their separation at the airport, T's mother and sisters left the airport but later managed to get to another country in the region, where they are now in hiding. T is protected under Temporary Protected Status while she waits on a decision on her asylum application. She is in her final year of high school and preparing to apply for college.

## Resources

Learn about [KIND's petition](#) to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act

Learn about [KIND's first year of work](#) with unaccompanied and separated children

Young Afghan children paint in an art class at the National Conference Center (NCC), on August 11, 2022 in Leesburg, Virginia. Photo by Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images