



**MILWAUKEE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

MPS Quick Reference Guide to Afghanistan and Afghan Culture for Educators and Staff

Where Is Afghanistan?

Afghanistan is part of southern Asia. It is a landlocked country bordered by Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China. The distance from Afghanistan to the United States is 7,429 miles. A direct flight from Milwaukee may take about 14 hours.



افغانستان



Geography

Afghanistan is similar in size to Texas. A significant portion of the country is mountainous and rugged. Land types include mountain valleys, highlands, grasslands, plains, semi-deserts, hot windy deserts, forests, and tundra.

Capital and Largest City: Kabul; population is estimated at 4.6 million in 2020.

Population: 38.04 million (according to the [World Bank](#) 2019). For comparison, the United States has a population of 331.5 million.

Climate

Climate varies widely from summer to winter. Summer temperatures can average about 95°F; winter temperatures can go as low as -15°F. Climate varies by terrain, particularly in the mountains.

Nomenclature

Afghanistan is the country.

Afghan is the adjective: ***We purchased Afghan artwork.***

Afghan is the singular noun: ***He is an Afghan.***

Afghans is the plural noun: ***They are Afghans from Kabul.***

Afghani is the currency used in Afghanistan: ***They paid 500 Afghani for a loaf of bread.***

Note that Afghani is not correct as the adjective or noun (but is commonly heard).

Afghan Culture

Languages: Dari and Pashto are the official languages and are widely used. Speakers of Dari and Farsi (also known as Persian) can communicate easily among each other, similar to the way that speakers of British English and American English can communicate. Bilingualism in Dari and Pashto is common. Dari, Farsi, and Pashto use the Arabic alphabet.

Religion: Approximately 99.7% of the Afghan population are Muslim; the proper name for their religion is Islam. A small percentage of Afghans are Sikh, Hindu, Baha'i, or Christian.

Cuisine: Largely based upon the nation's main crops including wheat, maize, barley, rice, native fruits, vegetables, and dairy products such as milk, yogurt, and whey. Diet may be restricted by religion; for example, Islamic law prohibits pork and certain other items.



Clothing: Loose fitting, flowing clothing is common. Men might

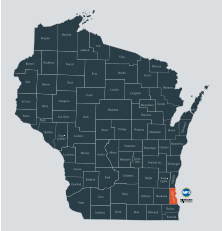
wear trousers with a long tunic. Women might wear layered dresses, sometimes with loose trousers. Some women might wear the burqa, which covers the head and entire face and allows a small, screened opening for the eyes. After arriving in the United States, some females may opt to wear a hijab (head covering). Preferences are personal and may change over time.



Why are Afghans coming to the U.S.?

The Taliban is a group that captured Kabul in 1996, took control of the government, and imposed their interpretation of Islamic law, which included many restrictions on women. Following September 11, 2001, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan to stop the Taliban from harboring al-Qaida, the group responsible for the terrorist attacks in the United States. The Taliban was driven from Kabul and a civilian government took over. In August 2021, the Taliban seized the government following a withdrawal of the U.S. military. The United States was then faced with evacuating its own citizens along with Afghans fleeing potential persecution from the Taliban. The refugees are mostly individuals who worked alongside the U.S. and NATO forces in various capacities (soldiers, interpreters, and so on) over the past 20 years.

How did refugees come to Wisconsin?

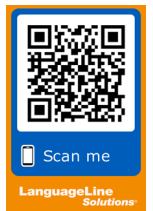


U.S. government agencies selected Fort McCoy, near Tomah, Wisconsin, as one of four sites to host refugees. Wisconsin has a long tradition of settling refugees from other countries. Afghan refugees who come to the United States undergo health and security checks. They will be processed at Fort McCoy and resettled in Wisconsin or other parts of the country. Resettlement agencies such as Lutheran Social Services and the International Institute of Wisconsin will be key organizations in this process and will help locate housing and jobs. Families who choose to settle in Milwaukee will be assisted by MPS Lau Compliance to locate appropriate schools near their home.

How should educators prepare?

MPS educators should use their training and skills in welcoming newcomers.

- ▶ Get to know your students and families. Approach students with a lens of empathy and trauma-informed care.
- ▶ Learn how to say a few phrases in your students' language.
- ▶ Be aware that students are in a major transition. Issues such as housing, clothing, medical resources, or immigration requirements may cause students to be absent from school from time to time.
- ▶ Realize that many Afghan refugees are middle class families who have left behind homes, jobs, possessions, and finances, and are now attempting to build a new life from scratch.
- ▶ Be mindful of religious practices such as food restrictions and prayer requirements. Ask your student or a family member if you have questions.
- ▶ Afghanistan's education system has been compromised by war; progress has been made since 2001.
- ▶ Use LanguageLine (<https://mpsmke.com/language>) to access an interpreter over the phone.
- ▶ Google Translate may be helpful but only in limited circumstances. Select Persian or Pashto.
- ▶ Contact the MPS Department of Communications to request translation (for written materials) or interpretation (oral) at mpsmke.com/translation or mpsmke.com/interpreter.
- ▶ For resources to combat bullying/harassment, visit stopbullying.gov or www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/aanhpi-massa-factsheet-201606.pdf.



Important Practices and Customs to Observe

Some information is derived from [Cultural Atlas: Afghan Culture](#)

- ▶ People of opposite gender generally do not touch unless they are family or close friends.
- ▶ School staff should not touch students of the opposite gender.
- ▶ When greeting, Afghans of opposite gender generally do not touch. Males should not offer a handshake to females but may shake hands if a female extends her hand.
- ▶ Eye contact is often minimal during greetings out of modesty, and out of respect, may be minimal for children interacting with elders.
- ▶ Use your right hand or both hands to gesture or offer anything; the left hand is for cleaning. Food is not handled in the left hand.
- ▶ If alone with an Afghan, leave the door open.
- ▶ Ask permission before taking a photo.
- ▶ Lateness is common; the Afghan view of punctuality is quite fluid.
- ▶ When offering anything (food, supplies), Afghan custom is to decline twice but accept on the third offer. This shows hospitality on the part of the giver and humbleness on the part of the recipient.
- ▶ Complimenting possessions can be tricky; an Afghan may feel compelled to offer the item to you. Politely decline.
- ▶ Students may expect to wash hands before eating and may be accustomed to eating with their hands.

Language Considerations

Become familiar with your students' English proficiency level. Use the Infinite Campus pathway for English Language Proficiency (ELP) verification: **Index > Student Information > English Learner > EL tabs**

For further information about the significance of ELP levels in learning English, contact your school ESL specialist.



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Who can educators contact within MPS?

For assistance, contact your school social worker, school nurse, school psychologist, or school counselor depending upon needs.

Instructional Coach/Family Engagement (ELs)

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What agencies can provide information and support?

Resettlement Information		General Information	Cultural Orientation
International Institute of Wisconsin (IIW) https://www.iiwisconsin.org/	Lutheran Social Services (LSS) https://www.lsswis.org/	Wisconsin Department of Children and Families https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/	https://switchboardta.org/ https://coresourceexchange.org/ https://brycs.org/

Helpful Phrases

A few basic phrases in Dari (Farsi/Persian) will be helpful. Dari uses the Arabic alphabet and is written from right to left. Books and printed materials open from what we consider to be the back of the book.

English	Written	Dari Pronunciation
Hello	سلام	Sah-LAHM
How are you?	چطور هستید؟	Singular: Cheh-tor-EE / Plural: Cheh-tor-EED
Please	لطفا	Lout-FAN
What is your name?	اسم شما چیست؟	Essmeh shoma cheest?
My name is ...	اسم من هست	Essmeh man [insert name] ast
Do you need help?	آیا به کمک احتیاج دارید؟	Aya beh koMAK eh-tee-AHJ dahREED
What language do you speak?	به چه زبانی صحبت می کنید؟	Beh cheh za-BAW-nee soh-bat me-koh-need? Possible answers: Dari, Farsi, Pashto
How do you say in Dari?	در دری چگونه می گویند؟	ChegonEH dar Dari me-goo-EED
My friend	دوست من	Doost eh MAN
Wait a moment for an interpreter.	یک لحظه صبر کنید ، منتظر یک مترجم باشید	Yek lah-zay sabr koNEED mone-taZAIR yek motarJEM basheed.
Classroom	کلاس	Keh-loss
Restroom	سرویس بهداشتی	Dast shoe-EE or Service BEH-dosh-tee
Parent signature is needed.	امضای والدین لازم است	Emza vawlay-DANE lahZEHM ast.