

Liaison officers assist Afghan evacuees during transition

By Pfc. Ty Baggerly, Army Public Affairs 22 September 2021



Army Sgt. Desiree Novoa, of Task Force Eagle, is one of many LNOs overseeing the welfare of Afghans in the United States.

As of August 27, Defense Department officials said the U.S. will make space for up to 22,000 Afghan refugees on its military bases, but that capacity can be expanded if needed. The Pentagon's Afghanistan Crisis

Action Group director Garry Reid said that Upon arriving in the U.S., most refugees are sent to Fort Lee in Virginia upon arriving in the United States where they undergo health screenings and background checks. Multiple governors have said they will take in Afghan refugees in their states.

FORT LEE, Va. — Operation Allies Welcome is underway and Task Force Eagle is providing medical, social services, religious services, job placement, community support and transportation for Afghans and their families to help them safely resettle in the United States.

“We are making sure their needs are met while they have their stay here before they go on their way to start the process of citizenship,” said Sgt. Jordan Moore, a motor transport operator with the 129th Combat Support Sustainment Brigade. “We get them processed so that way when they get to their destination, they can start their new lives. Get new jobs and a home.”

The 129th Combat Support Sustainment Brigade is leading the way by providing soldiers to assist with this process. Many of these soldiers are working as liaison officers (LNOs) and deal directly with the Afghan population multiple times throughout the day. These LNOs oversee the needs and welfare of their assigned group of Afghans.

“As the liaison officer, we have to make sure [their needs are accounted] for three times a day,” explained Sgt. Sagar Patel, a cargo specialist with the 129th Combat Support Sustainment Brigade. “If they need anything, clothing-wise or any essential item, we will assist in finding it for them.”

LNOs are assigned to a cohort of Afghan personnel, which can range from 25 to 50 people. This requires them to be at their best to manage the needs of their group.

“When you hear them say ‘thank you,’ with a smile on their face, you can see how happy they are,” said Patel. “It’s the most rewarding feeling and it makes me proud to be able to work with them.”

Many of the Afghan personnel are children who have been on a journey from their home country to a very different one, thousands of miles away.

“Having these kids come up to you and they look up to you like some kind of hero,” said Sgt. Desiree Novoa, a motor transport operator with the 129th Combat Support Sustainment Brigade. “I’m just doing what I can, to be fair. I just want to do what I can at whatever level. If it’s trying to find some shoes or taking two seconds to play curtsy with them in the hallway,

it's awesome.”

These soldiers are leading the way by providing a great service to the Afghan guests as we help them transition into the American way of life.

“Helping them has been the most impactful thing about being here,” said Novoa.

The Department of Defense, through U.S. Northern Command, and in support of the Department of Homeland Security, is providing transportation, temporary housing, medical screening, and general support for at least 50,000 Afghan evacuees at suitable facilities, in permanent or temporary structures, as quickly as possible. This initiative provides Afghan personnel essential support at secure locations outside Afghanistan.

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