

# Our New Afghan Neighbors

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## Who are our new Afghan neighbors?

Since August 2021, over 75,000 Afghan nationals ([about half of whom are children](#)) have been resettled in the United States, following the U.S. military's withdrawal from the country. The U.S. government dubbed this Operation Allies Welcome. For 20 years, American forces and international partners in Afghanistan depended on the vital services of Afghans who aided with translation, interpretation, transportation, and more during the intervention there. With the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan, these allies and their families are subject to significant dangers. [Reports](#) indicate that many Afghan allies and their families have been killed or targeted because of their work with the United States.

In 2009, Congress created the bipartisan, humanitarian Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program for Afghan nationals who assisted the U.S. government. The program offers admission to the United States, resettlement services, and legal permanent residence for approved applicants and their family members. According to a report from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), over 36,000 of the Afghans evacuated were SIV applicants who had been waiting for their applications to be processed at the time of the U.S. withdrawal. (The Afghan SIV program has been plagued by [significant processing delays](#), with applicants facing backlogs that stretch multiple years.) The same DHS report provided that over 4,000 of the 75,000 evacuated had already been referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). The remaining Afghans who did not fall into these categories were: (1) family members of U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents (LPRs); family members of SIV holders, SIV applicants, and refugee referrals; SIV-eligible persons; and those deemed eligible for USRAP.

The vast majority of those evacuated were granted parole for a period of two years.

## What is parole under U.S. immigration law?

The parole provision of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) gives the Secretary of DHS the authority to “parole into the United States temporarily under such conditions as he may prescribe only on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit any alien applying for admission to the United States” (INA 212(d)(5)(A)). In plain language, this means DHS and its subagencies can use parole to allow people to enter the United States for humanitarian reasons. This parole is typically only granted for one or two years, during which parolees are considered “applicants for admission.” Certain people who receive parole (otherwise known as “parolees”) may also apply for work authorization and, once granted, may live and work in the United States for the duration of their parole. Typically, parolees are not eligible for the same benefits and services as refugees who enter the United States through USRAP, nor do they have any guaranteed way to remain in the United States. However, Congress enacted legislation in September 2021 to make the Afghan parolee population eligible for the same benefits and services as conventional refugees. This has allowed them to be served by the national resettlement agencies.

This parole authority has been [utilized](#) by both Democratic and Republican administrations since the end of World War II to protect people fleeing from persecution. After the fall of Saigon at the end of the Vietnam War, the U.S. established a parole program to rapidly evacuate over 130,000 Vietnamese refugees under Operation New Life. In 1996, the U.S. resettled 6,600 Iraqi Kurds under Operation Pacific Haven.

## What is an adjustment act and why do our new Afghan neighbors need one?

Parole is not an immigration status. Rather, it is permission to enter and remain in the United States for a temporary and fixed period. Once in the country, newly arrived Afghans who are eligible can apply for asylum, employment- or family-based adjustment, or special immigrant status, each of which could result in lawful permanent residence. Unfortunately, there are many obstacles involved with each of those options. The current [affirmative asylum backlog](#) is over 200,000 cases. Many Afghan evacuees were forced to destroy important documentation during the evacuation in order to avoid Taliban violence across a patchwork of checkpoints around the country. Many Afghan visa applicants (and others) had important documentation destroyed by the U.S. Embassy in Kabul as the city fell. Such complications could make asylum claims more difficult and increase the likelihood that Afghan parolees will end up in already-overwhelmed immigration courts and eligible for deportation. That’s where an adjustment act comes in.

An Afghan Adjustment Act would provide a means for Afghans to fully integrate within American communities—essentially, to put them on the same legal footing they would have been, had they had the opportunity to enter the country as SIV holders or formal refugees through USRAP. The legislation would provide a more streamlined process for Afghan parolees to apply for permanent residence and, if they desired, later pursue naturalization. Without an Afghan adjustment act, thousands of Afghans would be in danger of falling out of status once their parole expires, adding to the United States’ existing undocumented population, lose work authorization, and be subject to deportation back to Afghanistan. Moreover, the task of helping Afghans to file asylum applications would fall to resettlement agencies and legal service providers in local communities, which are already stretched thin.

Congress has passed similar legislation at the conclusion of several U.S.-involved conflicts or humanitarian crises in the past. Three noteworthy examples include legislation passed following the Cuban Revolution (1966), after the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam (1977), and following both Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom (1999 and 2008, respectively). These adjustment acts granted Cubans, people from Southeast Asia, and Iraqis who had entered the United States as nonimmigrants or parolees the opportunity to adjust to LPR status. An Afghan Adjustment Act is also supported by [national security](#)

[experts](#), [refugee resettlement agencies](#), [Afghan-Americans](#), [faith leaders](#), [veterans groups](#), [attorneys](#), and [local communities](#) representing a broad spectrum of political and social views.

## How was this population screened prior to resettlement?

Intelligence, law enforcement, and counterterrorism professionals [conducted](#) a robust, multi-layered screening and security vetting process for all Afghans before they arrived in the United States and again once they arrived on U.S. soil. If at any time an individual does not pass a screening, they are deemed inadmissible or deportable, depending on where they are in the process. As a result, that individual and his or her family cannot enter the United States or are subject to deportation from the United States. This is coupled with the stringent background checks and security clearances that most Afghan allies went through to work alongside the U.S. military while in Afghanistan.

When Afghans apply to adjust status under the proposed Afghan Adjustment Act, DHS would run additional security and medical checks, complete a comprehensive biometrics analysis again, and conduct additional screening interviews before approving an applicant to make sure individuals are not national security or public safety threats to the United States. This additional layer of screenings is critical to ensure those who apply to adjust status remain in good standing with the laws of the United States.

## Why is this issue important to the Catholic Church?

The Catholic Church proclaims the sanctity and dignity of all human life. As disciples of Jesus Christ and messengers of the Gospel, Catholics are called to advocate for public policies that protect human life, promote human dignity, preserve God’s creation, and build peace. Christ himself identified with newcomers and other marginalized persons during his life: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt. 25:35). Through our work on behalf of immigrants and other newcomers, we live out Christ’s teachings and recognize his face in all those we serve, acknowledging the God-given dignity of every human person. Recently arrived Afghans are included among the millions of migrants, refugees, and others cared for by the Catholic Church in the United States and elsewhere around the world each year. Pope Francis has also [emphasized](#) the importance of integration throughout his papacy.

## What can I do to help?

Those seeking to help newly arrived Afghans can:

- [Call on Congress](#) to pass an Afghan Adjustment Act.
- [Pray](#) for the integration of all newcomers in the United States.
- Connect with and donate to your [local Catholic Charities agency](#).
- Visit [Welcome.us](#) to learn more about other donation and volunteer opportunities.
- Sign up for updates from the [Justice for Immigrants](#) campaign to get notified about opportunities to advocate for policies that promote the wellbeing of Afghans and other at-risk populations.

### For more information:

Please visit the [Afghanistan Resource Page](#) on the Justice for Immigrants website.

