



Afghan Arrivals

As of December 17, 2021 approximately 83,000 evacuees from Afghanistan have entered the United States.

Massachusetts is expected to resettle more than 2,000 Afghan evacuees, which is double the projected amount from September 2021. As of late January 2022, 1,500 evacuees have arrived here in the Commonwealth.

What immigration status do Afghan evacuees have?

Arriving Afghans are coming here legally and while the term “refugee” is used to describe them, they may actually be here under one of the following immigration statuses:

- **Special Immigrant Visa holders (SIVs)**: individuals who worked for the U.S. government or government contractors in Afghanistan for at least a year, and their immediate families
- **SQ/SI parolees**: individuals with pending SIV applications
- **Humanitarian parolees**: Afghans who do not have one of the above statuses were granted humanitarian parole for a period of two years. This is the largest category of recent Afghan arrivals. While this provides them with work authorization it does not provide permanent protection, and many of them are expected to seek asylum.

What assistance are they eligible for?

Refugees and SIV holders qualify for various benefits that are made available under federal law to refugees and individuals granted asylum. On September 30, 2021, Congress extended these same benefits to Afghans who were evacuated on humanitarian parole, allowing all recent Afghan arrivals access to key benefits for an initial 8 month period, which can be extended if income eligible. These include:

- Cash assistance for individuals and families (SSI, TANF, Refugee Cash Assistance)
- Employment services (Matching Grant programs, state-specific programs, Refugee Support Services)
- English instruction
- Medical assistance (Medicaid or Refugee Medical Assistance)
- Other targeted services for up to 5 years (e.g. industry-specific job training, entrepreneurship programs, extended social services)

In December 2021, MIRA Coalition successfully advocated for Massachusetts to allocate \$12 million dollars for Afghan arrivals as part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) disbursement, to be administered by the state’s refugee resettlement agencies. These dollars will help newly arriving Afghan families obtain necessary health, housing, employment, and other services that facilitate integration into our communities.

Uncertainty still remains for Afghan parolees

Unlike refugees, those who have been granted asylum, and SIV holders, Afghan arrivals who received humanitarian parole are currently not eligible to apply for lawful permanent residence (a green card), and currently face uncertainty beyond the 2 year grant of parole. Parolees who file an asylum application may be able to benefit from an “expedited review” but as the backlog of asylum cases approaches 350,000 pending cases nationally, timelines remain uncertain.

Passage of an Afghan Adjustment Act is crucial to provide quicker processing and a more secure path for Afghan parolees who have already been thoroughly vetted and are looking to start a new life here. Similar to what refugees and those granted asylum can do, such a law would allow parolees to adjust their status and apply for a green card after a certain time in the U.S.

You can help create a more welcoming community for newly arriving Afghan evacuees by contacting your member of Congress [here](#) and asking them to pass an Afghan Adjustment Act!

Interested in doing more?

- You can explore the possibility of establishing a Sponsor Circle in your community to support a recently arrived Afghan family.
- You can reach out to your local organization working with Afghan arrivals to volunteer. The following organizations provide a range of direct services to Afghan refugees here in Massachusetts. Learn more about volunteering and other services at the links below:

International Institute New England
Ascentria Care Alliance
Refugee Immigrant and Assistance Center
Catholic Charities Boston
Jewish Family Services MetroWest
Jewish Family Services of Western Mass
Southeast Asian Coalition

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