



OPERATION ALLIES WELCOME

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OVERVIEW

On August 29, 2021, President Biden directed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to lead and coordinate ongoing efforts across the federal government to support vulnerable Afghans, including those who worked alongside us in Afghanistan for the past two decades, as they safely resettle in the United States. At the President's direction, the Secretary of Homeland Security is working with representatives from across the government to coordinate our response and ensure unity of effort.

To lead the effort in support of Operation Allies Welcome, DHS established a Unified Coordination Group (UCG). The UCG reports directly to the Secretary of Homeland Security and coordinates the implementation of a broad range of services, including initial processing, COVID-19 testing, isolation of COVID-positive individuals, vaccinations, additional medical services, and screening and support for individuals who are neither U.S. citizens nor lawful permanent residents. This support includes initial processing at pre-designated U.S. military bases prior to being connected with non-governmental organizations for resettlement into communities. The work of the UCG is undertaken in close collaboration with partners in state and local government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.

OPERATIONAL PHASES

Screening and Vetting Prior to Arrival in the United States

The U.S. government is working around the clock to conduct the security screening and vetting of vulnerable Afghans before they are permitted entry into the United States, consistent with the dual goals of protecting national security and providing protection for our Afghan allies. As with any population entering the United States, DHS, in coordination with interagency vetting partners, takes multiple steps to ensure that those seeking entry do not pose a national security or public safety risk.

DHS deployed approximately 400 personnel from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Transportation Security Administration, United States Coast Guard, and United States Secret Service to Bahrain, Germany, Kuwait, Italy, Qatar, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates to conduct processing, screening, and vetting in coordination with the Departments of Defense (DOD) and State (DOS) and other federal agencies, and to conduct interviews as needed, with the goal of bringing to the United States Afghan nationals who worked for the United States, as well as other vulnerable Afghans.

The rigorous screening and vetting process, which is multi-layered and ongoing, involves biometric and biographic screenings conducted by intelligence, law enforcement, and counterterrorism professionals from DHS and DOD, as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), and additional intelligence community partners. This process includes reviewing fingerprints, photos, and other biometric and biographic data for every single Afghan before they are cleared to travel to the United States. As with other arrivals at U.S. ports of entry, Afghan nationals undergo a primary inspection when they arrive at a U.S. airport, and a secondary inspection is conducted as the circumstances require.



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Humanitarian Parole

Most Afghan nationals arriving as part of the evacuation effort will be paroled into the United States on a case-by-case basis, for humanitarian reasons, for a period of two years. As noted above, parole is only issued subsequent to required screening and vetting. Afghan nationals have conditions placed on their parole, including requiring them to receive medical screening, critical vaccinations, and other reporting requirements. Failure to fulfill these conditions may cause individuals to have their work authorization denied, and potentially to have their parole terminated, which could lead to detention and removal proceedings. Afghan parolees may be eligible to apply for immigration benefits through U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Special Immigrant Visas

Afghans who have completed the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) process and who possess visas, and their dependents, will be admitted as lawful permanent residents and assisted by DOS and non-governmental organizations to begin their resettlement process. Those individuals who have not finished the SIV application process are paroled in by DHS. They can continue to pursue special immigrant status (and ultimately lawful permanent residency) or they may apply for another immigration status through USCIS. Such individuals will be eligible to apply for work authorization.

More than 40 percent of Afghans who have arrived as a part of Operation Allies Welcome are eligible for Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) because they took significant risks to support our military and civilian personnel in Afghanistan, employed by or on behalf of the U.S. government in Afghanistan or our coalition forces, or are a family member of someone who did. Some are SIV applicants who were already in the SIV pipeline.

It is important to note that not every Afghan who is eligible for the SIV program has applied for it, and the SIV program as it is currently designed does not cover every Afghan who supported the United States in Afghanistan. Additionally, the United States evacuated journalists, human rights activists, humanitarian workers, and other Afghans whose careers put them at risk, as well as family members of American citizens and lawful permanent residents.

COVID-19 Testing, Vaccinations, and Other Medical Services

The U.S. government continues to take every precaution to stop the spread of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases consistent with CDC guidance. All those who enter – U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, and Afghan nationals – are tested for COVID-19.

Additionally, Afghan nationals who are paroled into the United States are required to complete vaccinations for MMR, varicella, polio, COVID-19, and other age-appropriate vaccinations, as well as medical exams and health screenings, as a condition of their humanitarian parole. All testing, vaccinations, and other medical services are available at no cost.



Processing at U.S. Military Facilities

After they finish processing at the port of entry, U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, and SIV holders may depart the airport, while SIV applicants and other vulnerable Afghan allies who were granted humanitarian parole are provided transportation to U.S. military facilities where they receive a full medical screening and a variety of services before moving onto their next destination. DOD is providing temporary housing facilities for SIV applicants and other vulnerable Afghans at eight installations: Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia; Fort Pickett, Virginia; Fort Lee, Virginia; Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico; Fort McCoy, Wisconsin; Fort Bliss, Texas; Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey; and Camp Atterbury, Indiana. While on these bases, Afghans have access to a range of services, including medical care and mental health services. During this step in the process, Afghan nationals are able to apply for work authorization with USCIS personnel and are connected to resettlement services.

DOS works closely with DOD and DHS to coordinate the civilian and non-governmental staff working at the military bases to ensure Afghans receive basic support and can finalize processing on base in order to transition to resettlement. Once Afghans have completed all processing steps, DOS works with its resettlement agency partners to assign and transfer them to their final destination.

Applying for Immigration Status, Work Authorization, and Essential Coverage

USCIS personnel are adjudicating applications for employment authorization, conducting other immigration processing, and providing administrative support, including translation services, to expedite the processing of applications for immigrant status and work authorization. DOS and the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) are working to provide initial relocation support to Afghans granted parole and to ensure that those Afghans arriving in American communities have initial support, including health insurance. Provisions in the Continuing Resolution passed by Congress on September 30, 2021 authorized Afghan parolees to receive the same benefits and services as refugees.

Resettlement Processing

Arriving Afghans are connected to resettlement agencies and community partners for initial resettlement assistance. DOS is leading this effort in close coordination with more than 200 local resettlement affiliates around the country. The local affiliates conduct extensive engagement with local communities to develop resources and support.

Through the Afghan Placement and Assistance Program (APA), individuals are placed in communities across the country to begin rebuilding their lives. As with traditional resettlement processes, placement of individuals considers U.S.-based family and friends, housing availability, community capacity, and the needs and characteristics of each case.

During the resettlement process, Afghan nationals are provided with briefings on the conditions of their parole and that violating the law violates their parole. These briefings include information on U.S. laws and rights, including that illegal actions or activities could lead to prosecution and imprisonment and may jeopardize an individual's immigration status.

In addition to Operation Allies Welcome, DOS is managing referrals to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for Afghans who assisted or were associated with the United States in Afghanistan, so that they can be considered for U.S. refugee resettlement from a third country if they have already left or leave Afghanistan. For more information on Afghan refugee processing, see the State Department Fact Sheet: U.S. Refugee Admissions Program Priority 2 Designation for Afghan Nationals.



How the Public Can Help

In coordination with other federal agencies and private sector and non-profit partners, DOS is collaborating with Welcome.US, a national non-profit initiative that launched in September 2021 to channel support from the American public and the private sector to newly arrived Afghans and their families. People who are interested in assisting arriving Afghans can go to Welcome.US to learn about ways to get involved.

In addition, DOS is working with the Community Sponsorship Hub to support the launch of the Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans, a new program which enables groups of individuals and community organizations across the country to directly support Afghans who have been relocated to the United States under Operation Allies Welcome. The program will enable groups of individuals to apply to be vetted, trained, and certified to form sponsor circles to provide initial resettlement assistance to Afghans as they arrive and build new lives in local communities across the country. For more information on the Sponsor Circle Program and to learn how to apply to form a sponsor circle to support arriving Afghans, visit www.sponsorcircles.org.

