

The Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program 2009-2018

What is the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program?

- ✓ In 2009, Congress passed the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009. The Act provided special immigrant visas (SIVs) to Afghans who had worked for at least one year as translators or interpreters, or who were employed by, or on behalf of, the U.S. government in Afghanistan, and whose lives were threatened because of their work in support of the U.S. mission. The visas allow these wartime allies to resettle in the United States.
- ✓ A similar program was enacted in 2008 for Iraqi translators, interpreters, and workers, but that program stopped accepting new applications in September 2014, and now those Iraqi wartime allies apply directly to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program through what's known as the Direct Access Program.¹

Why is the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program Important?

- ✓ U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan continues. We cannot complete our mission there without the Afghan translators, engineers, security guards, embassy clerks, logisticians, cultural advisors, and soldiers who stand by us. Many of these allies and their families now face death threats for their service to the U.S. We gave our word to protect these allies--a promise that we have kept since 2009.
- ✓ The Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program represents a promise that we made to our wartime allies. Following through on that promise is not only vital to maintaining support of the Afghan people, it is vital to completing our mission there and to for future wars in which we may be engaged.
- ✓ Likewise, as the U.S. continues to protect its interests elsewhere around the world, it will need the continued assistance of those willing to stand with us. We must ensure that the U.S. is known as a country that keeps its promises and never forgets its allies. Continuing to reauthorize the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program and increasing the number of visas to accommodate the need of our allies sends the message that the U.S. never leaves anyone behind.
- ✓ As of July 2017, over 11,000 Afghan principal applicants and 13,000 of their family members are still waiting at some point in the application phase.²

¹ <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2016/254650.htm>

² https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/SIVs/Afghan_SIV_report_July2017.pdf

Legislative History of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program

- ☑ From Fiscal Years (FY) 2009-2013, 1,500 Afghan SIV's were allocated per year. In the 2014 Consolidated Appropriations Act, 3,000 SIV's were allocated for the year, with an additional 1,000 allocated for 2014 through the Emergency Afghan Allies Extension Act.³
- ☑ In FY 2015 and 2016, Congress authorized additional Afghan SIV's through the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). For FY 2015, 4,000 visas were allocated. For FY 2016, an additional 3,000 SIV's were authorized.⁴ The FY 2016 NDAA also increased the minimum work requirement to two years for Afghan SIV recipients.
- ☑ The NDAA for FY 2017, signed into law in December of 2016, allocated 1,500 SIVs, and reauthorized the Afghan SIV program for an additional four years. FY 2017 NDAA's authorization of only 1,500 additional proved to be insufficient to service the need of our Afghan allies. In March 2017, the U.S. embassy in Kabul stopped interviewing Afghans applying for the Special Immigrant Visa program.
- ☑ Recognizing the current visa shortage crisis, a bi-partisan coalition in Congress, led by Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), John McCain (R-AZ), Jack Reed (D-RI), Thom Tillis (R-NC) and Representatives Adam Kinzinger (R-IL), Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Steve Stivers (R-OH), and Seth Moulton (D-MA), introduced legislation to provide an emergency stopgap solution. In May 2017, through the omnibus legislation in the Consolidation Appropriations Act, an additional 2,500 visas were allocated to Afghan principal applicants.

Fiscal Year 2018 NDAA Provisions for the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program

- ☑ The U.S. Congressional Conference Committee of the Senate and the House released their conference report in November 2017, which included 3,500 Afghan Special Immigrant Visas for FY 2018.⁵
- ☑ The NDAA for FY 2018 was signed into law by President Trump on December 12, 2017.⁶

³ <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesecc/R43725.pdf>

⁴ https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/SIVs/Afghan%20SIV%20public%20report_Jan%202016.pdf

⁵ <http://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20171113/HRPT-115-HR2810.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-signs-national-defense-authorization-act-live-stream/>