

Fact Sheet: Congress Must Restore Access to Needed Resettlement Services for Arriving Afghan Parolees

July 2024

On September 30, 2023, Congress failed to update legislation (as it had done previously in 2022) to extend authorization for newly-arriving Afghan humanitarian parolees to access key refugee services and mainstream benefits. Even as benefits were retroactively [restored](#) to arriving Ukrainian parolees in an April 2024 supplemental funding package, Congress failed to include the same fix for Afghans.

As thousands of Afghan parolees continue to arrive in the U.S., this pause in services has been profoundly and increasingly disruptive. Arriving Afghans have been unable to access support in their new homes, placing individuals we have pledged to protect at risk. **Congress can and must act swiftly to live up to our promise to those who have fled Afghanistan and enact retroactive authorization language that extends eligibility to access resettlement benefits for arriving Afghan parolees.**

Background

Humanitarian parole provides entry and admission to the United States for noncitizens – and offers temporary protection from removal and work authorization during the period of parole. However, Congress must specifically authorize parolee populations to receive the same resettlement services and services as other humanitarian entrants (refugees, asylees, etc). On September 30, 2021, Congress passed the Afghan Supplemental Appropriations Act, which granted Afghans paroled into the United States through September 30, 2022 eligibility for certain services and benefits administered by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Since then Congress has [repeatedly extended](#) eligibility for arriving Afghan parolees. Most recently, on December 29, 2022 Congress [extended](#) the eligibility window through September 30, 2023 in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023.

But despite numerous opportunities in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, Congress has failed to extend authorization, allowing those critical integration services to lapse for thousands of newly arriving Afghan humanitarian parolees. When the clock struck midnight on September 30, 2023, Afghans arriving on humanitarian parole were suddenly cut off from support – whether they arrived at ports of entry at the southern border or through the traditional humanitarian parole process through Form I-131.

For Afghans who arrived before September 30, resettlement agencies have worked with their local communities, sponsors, and Afghan community organizations to help Afghans access resources and benefits to swiftly [acclimate](#) and obtain self-sufficiency and economic vitality. Local resettlement staff reach out to eligible Afghan arrivals to share information about services they are eligible for, such as 90-day intensive case management; [employment](#) services; [health coverage](#); [cash](#), [legal](#), and [food assistance](#); and direct assistance for other needs to avoid a family breakdown. Depending on client needs, resettlement staff identify other specialized programs that would benefit their successful integration, such as mental health services, wellness or peer support groups, Survivor of Torture and Recovery Services, out-of-school time programs for youth, family or youth mentoring programs, entrepreneurship or business start-ups, job training and readiness programs, or higher education programs. **Since September 30, 2023, those services have suddenly ceased for new Afghan arrivals.**

Who are the Afghans impacted by the pause in services?

When the elected Afghan government fell to the Taliban and the U.S. military withdrew from the country in August 2021, [hundreds of thousands](#) of Afghans who had served or supported the U.S. mission were left behind and in danger. In the initial evacuation period, more than 76,000 Afghan allies were welcomed via parole through an interagency effort dubbed Operation Allies Welcome (OAW).

Following the conclusion of OAW, three key humanitarian pathways continue to be used to evacuate and resettle Afghans who remain at risk due to their support for the United States: The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program, and humanitarian parole. The refugee and SIV programs provide permanent protection and access to support from resettlement agencies upon arrival in the United States, but both pathways face lengthy backlogs and strict eligibility requirements and remain too slow and restrictive to offer protection for many of those most at risk.

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Rather than wait for protection that may arrive too late, tens of thousands of at-risk Afghans have sought to find safety in the U.S. through humanitarian parole – even after the conclusion of the OAW airlift. More than [44,000 Afghans](#) applied using the [general I-131 humanitarian parole form](#) that allows anyone outside the United States to request entry due to urgent humanitarian or significant public benefit reasons. To be approved, Afghans must demonstrate they are at risk of “targeted or individualized harm.” While initially there were long delays in processing these applications, recent guidance and data has demonstrated an increase in approvals and arrivals in the U.S.

In addition to the I-131 arrivals, more than [10,000](#) Afghans have fled through Brazil, navigated the deadly Darién Gap, and sought protection (through parole) at the U.S.-Mexico border. Service providers have observed that many of those arriving at the border are in the midst of SIV cases or have been referred to the refugee resettlement program. Some even have Chief of Mission approval, a step in the SIV process in which an applicant must confirm they worked directly on behalf of the U.S. mission for a period of at least 12 months.

In other words, the administration has recognized that, due to their service for the U.S. mission, these arriving Afghan parolees (both at the border and via approved I-131 applications) are at risk and eligible for U.S. support and protection.

Spotlight: Afghan Evacuees Cut Off From Services

An Afghan family of three (a husband, wife, and daughter) arrived in **Richardson, Texas** after crossing the border in early 2024. The family had waited at the border for months in order to be processed at a port of entry – but upon entry the husband was separated from his wife and daughter and placed in detention. The wife and daughter were given two years of parole. The husband remained in detention for weeks, found legal counsel, and was ultimately granted asylum following a hearing before an Immigration Judge. The wife and daughter could not be included on his claim as they have separate notices to appear in immigration court in 2025.

As an asylee, the husband is now eligible for ORR support services from the resettlement agency in Richardson, but the wife and daughter remain ineligible due to their entrance on parole after the September 30 cut off – they cannot receive integration services, legal support to resolve their complicated removal proceedings, or any other needed assistance. As the case manager in Richardson noted, “the only difference between them and the countless other clients we serve is their entry date.”

A young Afghan man who struggles with a medical condition that impacts his breathing and requires regular treatment and medication arrived in the U.S. and was granted parole in December 2023. He took refuge with a friend living in **northern Virginia** – assuming he would have access to the same assistance and benefits that Afghan parolees who arrived before him had received. But when he visited a local resettlement office to access ORR support and apply for mainstream benefits, the site was unable to assist him. Without health insurance or access to affordable medical care, his medical condition has worsened, and his friend cannot support him for much longer. Had he arrived just months earlier, the office would have been able to offer medical assistance, help him apply for benefits and access rental and cash assistance.

Two Afghan sisters arrived on parole in March 2024 and have been striving to settle in **Sacramento, California**. They were referred by a community group to a resettlement agency affiliate site to provide intensive case management support through the Office of Refugee Resettlement Preferred Communities program – including employment counseling, English language classes, and support finding sustainable, affordable housing. While the site has the experience and the capacity to provide support, it was unable to offer services for the two sisters because they arrived on parole after authorization expired on September,

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30 2023. The site is still in touch with the sisters, who currently face imminent risk of homelessness.

What services are no longer available to arriving Afghan humanitarian parolees due to congressional inaction?

Humanitarian parole alone provides essentially no services beyond protection from deportation and access to work authorization (unless states extend eligibility for benefits on their own). Through the Afghan Supplemental Appropriations Act, Congress provided the following services and benefits to Afghan parolees, enabling communities around the country to take part in the welcoming effort. Afghan parolees arriving before September 30, 2023, are [eligible](#) for:

Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) services, including:

- **Refugee Support Services: Employability Support.** RSS provides job training and preparation and assistance with job search and placement.
- **Transitional and Medical Services.** These include refugee cash and medical assistance, and other services that empower Afghans to access self-sufficiency.
- **Legal Assistance.** ORR has authorized Afghan parolees to receive [immigration-related legal assistance](#), which includes support for filing applications for work authorization, affirmative claims to asylum, and other applications to maintain their status.

Mainstream federal benefits, including:

- **Medicaid**, which helps cover medical expenses for those with limited resources.
- **Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF)**, which provides cash assistance to low-income families with children.
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**, which provides food assistance to low-income families to support their grocery budget.

What can Congress do to restore access to services?

In any legislation that moves, Congress can right this wrong by including a single sentence of legislative text ([Title 5, Section 1501 here](#), striking “September 30, 2023” and replacing it with “September 30, 2025”). Congress should do everything in its power to include retroactive authorization language that extends access to ORR and mainstream benefits to Afghan humanitarian parolees arriving starting October 1, 2023.