

Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance

Economic Services Administration | Community Services Division

Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Holders and Refugees

Due to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, many thousands of people are seeking to leave the country. Through [Operation Allies Refuge](#), the United States government is working to resettle Afghan individuals and their families to safety in communities across the nation. In 2009, the U.S. Congress instituted the Special Immigrant Visa, or SIV, status to provide permanent protection to Afghans affiliated with U.S. missions, such as translators and interpreters. Eligible individuals can apply for themselves as well as for their spouse and any unmarried children under age 21. Afghan SIVs are eligible for Refugee Resettlement Services in the United States, including those programs and services offered by the DSHS Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance.

Afghan SIVs Arrivals in Washington

Washington state has a long legacy of welcoming refugees and immigrants. From 2010 to 2020, Washington state welcomed approximately 30,213 refugees, including 4,166 Afghan SIVs. Just this federal fiscal year, Washington has welcomed 348 people from Afghanistan between Oct. 1, 2020 and July 30, 2021. Over the past two to three years, Washington welcomed approximately 8% of the nation's total SIV arrivals. The highest concentration of Afghan SIVs have arrived in King County, with some resettling in Pierce, Snohomish and Spokane counties. Through [Operation Allies Refuge](#), from July 29 – Aug. 14, 2021, Washington welcomed 143 Afghans to our local communities. Washington anticipates receiving more individuals and families from Afghanistan through this program.

How will Afghan SIVs arrive and resettle in Washington?

Afghan SIVs arrive in Washington through the United States Refugee Admissions Program and are eligible to receive [Reception and Placement Services](#). Eight refugee resettlement agencies in Washington state participate in a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of State to provide these initial services. Resettlement agencies assist SIVs with initial services, including providing housing that has essential furnishings, culturally appropriate food and other basic necessities. Case managers assist SIVs in applying for Social Security cards and public assistance programs, enrolling in employment services, registering children and youth for school, and connecting them with necessary social or language services. Through the R&P program, Afghan SIVs receive a one-time cash grant of approximately \$1,200 per member of the household. These federal dollars are used to cover rent and all essential needs during the first 90 days of resettlement.

What public benefits are Afghan SIVs eligible to receive?

Afghan SIVs are eligible to apply for all of Washington's cash, food and medical assistance programs. Families with dependent children may be eligible to receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Single and married adults without dependents will be able to receive [Refugee Cash Assistance](#). The [Washington Basic Food Program](#) provides food assistance for low-income individuals and families. Afghan SIVs will also be enrolled in [Apple Health](#), Washington's federal Medicaid program, administered by the Washington State Health Care Authority.

What services are available to Afghan SIV?

The DSHS Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance invests more than \$25 million in federal and state dollars each year to local community organizations to provide services to refugee and immigrants. These programs and services fall into four core areas: Refugee Health and Wellness, Employment and Training, Immigration Assistance and Naturalization Services, and Whole Family Programs. Whole Family Programs offer services for kids and their parents in K-12 education, refugee youth between ages 18-24, refugee elders and unaccompanied refugee minors. These services are available to Afghan SIVs and other refugees for up to five years.

ORIA partners with more than 60 different organizations across the state, including refugee resettlement agencies. The Afghan SIVs who are arriving will be able to connect to the following programs and services:

- [Refugee Health Screenings](#) and Health Promotion Program
- [LEP Pathway Employment and ESL Programs](#)
- Career Ladder for Educated and Vocationally Experience Refugees or CLEVER
- [ORIA Basic Food Employment and Training Program](#)
- [PRIME Program](#)
- [Refugee School Impact Program](#)
- Refugee Elders Program

What challenges are we seeing for the current Afghan SIV arrivals?

The biggest challenge in welcoming Afghan SIVs is finding sufficient, affordable temporary and permanent housing. Typically, refugee resettlement agencies receive at least 10-day notice that an Afghan SIV is arriving. With the current situation, Afghan individuals and families are frequently arriving with less than 24-hour notice. Most Afghan SIVs are coming to join family and friends who are currently living in Washington communities. They frequently want to live close to these U.S. ties to assist with their resettlement process. Due to the pandemic, hotel capacity and availability through Airbnb is limited. Assistance with finding safe and affordable housing is the most critical need at this time.

The second most important challenge is responding to the mental health and trauma for individuals and families arriving in Washington. It is important to be able to offer support that is trauma-informed and culturally responsive for those who are arriving. Community members already residing in Washington may also be experience trauma due to being separated from family and friends and the fear and anxiety of seeing the Afghan government fall.

What can people do to help?

Anyone interested in helping can connect directly with local [refugee resettlement agencies](#) or directly with the DSHS Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance by sending an email to ORIAinfo@dshs.wa.gov.

For more information, please contact Sarah Peterson, Washington State Refugee Coordinator, at sarah.peterson@dshs.wa.gov.