

The Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program 2009-2019

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 June 30, 2018, the Department of State has issued 10,705 out of the 14,500 SIVs to Afghan principal applicants. However, 10,955 Afghan principal applicants and 12,067 of their family members are still waiting at some point in the application phase, with less than 3,800 visas available.²

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

² https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/SIVs/Q3-Afghan_SIV_Report_July_2018.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 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 visa shortage crisis, in May 2017, through the Consolidation Appropriations Act, an additional 2,500 visas were allocated to Afghan principal applicants.
- ☑ The NDAA for FY 2018 allocated an additional 3,500 Afghan SIVs.

Fiscal Year 2019 Requests for the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program

- ☑ The NDAA for FY 2019 passed without inclusion of additional Afghan SIVs due to legislative impediments. A potential path forward for allocation of additional visas is their inclusion in the FY 2019 State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs appropriations bill.
- ☑ Authorization of an additional 4,000 Afghan SIVs is included in the final draft of the FY 2019 State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs appropriations bill, the amount requested by President Trump for FY 2019.⁵

Political Standoff Impedes Authorization of New Special Immigrant Visas

- ☑ Due to a political standoff between the Trump Administration and congressional Democrats over funding for a border wall, the government entered a 35-day government shutdown on December 22. On January 25, Congress enacted a continuing resolution to reopen the government until February 15.
- ☑ Since the continuing resolution expires on February 15, political developments will determine one of three ways forward. Congress will either vote on the FY 2019 State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs appropriations bill, enact another stopgap measure to temporarily fund the government, or enter another shutdown.
- ☑ As of February 5, no new Afghan Special Immigrant Visas are authorized for FY 2019.

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

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

⁵ [https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2018-08-21%20Grassley,%20Shaheen%20to%20Appropriations%20Leaders%20\(Special%20Immigrant%20Visas\).pdf](https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2018-08-21%20Grassley,%20Shaheen%20to%20Appropriations%20Leaders%20(Special%20Immigrant%20Visas).pdf)