

What is an SIV...and why do I care?

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SIV... Special Immigrant Visa... is a program established in 2008 to help Iraqis and Afghans in danger of being killed by local militias or criminals as the result of their service to the United States military as translators or in other civilian jobs.

At the present time, the program's focus is on Afghans. As of 2020, more than 18,000 Afghan SIV applicants had been approved, along with 45,000 of their immediate family members, for immigration to the United States. In December 2020, an additional 4,000 SIVs were authorized for the 2021 fiscal year. While this may seem like a large number, at present there is a substantial backlog of applications that have not been fully processed. There are many more, potentially eligible individuals, than approved visas. In addition, severe restrictions imposed by the Trump administration resulted in the cancellation of travel arrangements for many with approved visas, so these individuals who helped our troops and the U.S. government are now waiting, in peril, for the green light to immigrate.

The program is well-intentioned, and it has been beneficial to successful applicants. However, its inefficient implementation has put the lives of many of the eligible individuals and their immediate families at risk. Especially now, as the U.S. and our allies are moving rapidly to full withdrawal by September 11, 2021, the lack of a coherent, effective strategy to support these workers, and the failure to effectively and efficiently implement the SIV program, will leave our local allies stranded and vulnerable to attacks by the Taliban and criminal groups, as well as other forms of exploitation.

In April 2021, a bipartisan Congressional group sent a letter to President Biden pressing the administration to expedite the program and provide appropriate asylum for the Afghans, and their families, who supported our efforts against the Taliban. "There are thousands of these folks who knew what they were getting into and took on great risk to themselves and their families to serve with us, and we cannot leave them behind," said the top Democrat on the letter.*

So, why do I care? As a veteran of a foreign war (albeit in a previous century), I am well aware of the help and support we received from local citizens who worked with us as translators, and provided other needed services to our hospital unit, where I was a member of the Medical Corps. I have often wondered how the Viet Cong treated Mr. Ngo, who worked beside me in the receiving station in Chu Lai, once the U.S. finally moved out.

In considering the current situation, however, there is an impending humanitarian crisis if we withdraw without providing for the safety of those who served on our behalf. Equally important

will be the impact of such a failure on the likelihood of local support, should it be needed in the future.

The United States promised to keep our Afghan allies safe. We must keep that promise, if we intend to keep the respect of the rest of the world.

Neighbors for Refugees, in cooperation with Hearts and Homes for Refugees and with Vets for American Ideals, is taking action to encourage our government to do the right thing. You can find out how to participate in this action by contacting Ruth Gyure (gyurer@gmail.com), or amy@heartsandhomesforrefugees.org or CutrightE@humnrighstfirst.org .

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<https://www.rollcall.com/2021/05/03/sluggish-visa-program-imperils-afghan-partners-as-us-withdraws/>