



# POLICY & ADVOCACY REPORT

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## **Not a Numbers Game: Human Faces of the Crisis in Afghanistan**

Many of us have been shaken by recent news of the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. As news outlets report staggering numbers of people in danger, it can be easy to decontextualize those large figures from the humans they reflect. USCRI, and other refugee resettlement agencies and human rights organizations across the United States, have received countless emails, phone calls, and messages from Afghans fearing for their and their families' lives, each with unique circumstances that cannot be compartmentalized into a visa priority category, or a number.

Four of those humans are the children of a woman named Suneeta. About a year ago, Suneeta arrived in Albany, New York from Afghanistan as a refugee. Her husband had worked as an interpreter and team leader with the U.S. military at Camp Eggers before disappearing in 2013. Although unconfirmed, it is almost certain his disappearance, and likely murder, was at the hands of the Taliban based on his affiliation with the United States' mission. After losing her husband, Suneeta feared Taliban retaliatory action would be extended to herself and their four children, so she crossed the border into Pakistan where the family of five was granted refugee status by UNHCR. While in Pakistan, Suneeta began to explore the possibility of moving to the United States. Her husband had put his life on the line for the American mission, and she hoped the United States would welcome her family by virtue of his sacrifice. However, Suneeta's plans were horribly disrupted when her brother-in-law covertly kidnapped her four children while he was visiting, and brought them back to Afghanistan where they were to live with her deceased husband's family, as is customary in traditional Afghan families. Not long after, her case was picked up for resettlement in the United States, and she saw a window of opportunity to get her children back.

From the day she arrived in New York in mid-2020, Suneeta began to pursue every avenue to bring her children from Afghanistan to the United States. In tandem with one of USCRI's attorneys, she filed for refugee status on her children's behalf, and booked interviews at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, the final step in being granted humanitarian parole. They were ultimately turned away from their interviews due to passport and documentation-related issues, and have been trying to rectify those issues ever since. The children, two of whom are teenagers, two of whom are under 10 years old, now live unaccompanied in Kabul. Since the U.S. Embassy in Kabul is no longer conducting interviews, they will not be granted humanitarian parole in country – they simply need to get on a flight, and their status can be processed when they are brought to safety. They have spent the last two days circling the Kabul airport in a taxicab, waiting for the moment when planes resume flight, and they can at long last reunite with their mother safely.

### **American-Affiliated Afghans are Caught in Limbo**

Over the weekend, Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul, the last and largest remaining area under Afghan government control, fell to the Taliban. U.S.-backed President Ashraf Ghani fled to neighboring Tajikistan with his family and other government officials as Taliban militants took over the Presidential palace, installing themselves as the de facto

governing force in the country. Since it became clear about a month ago that the Afghan military were unable to stave off the Taliban's rapid territorial gains, the U.S. government ramped up the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program started in 2006, which authorized visas for Iraqis and Afghans who worked directly for the U.S. military and diplomatic corps. The Biden administration also launched [Operation Allies Refuge](#) on July 14th to help facilitate relocation for Afghan nationals who are already SIV holders or in the final stages of the SIV application process. The Department of State also activated the [Afghanistan Coordination Task Force](#) on July 19th, an interagency effort to operationalize logistics for visa applications and evacuating U.S. citizens from the country. In a rare bipartisan act, Congress passed an [emergency supplemental spending bill](#) on July 27th which allocated \$1.12 billion to Afghan refugee assistance.

Despite the steps taken by Congress and the Biden administration, more than 80,000 American-affiliated Afghans and their families remain in Afghanistan, and hundreds of thousands more Afghans are in need of evacuation. Regardless of where SIV, Priority 2 (P-2), or humanitarian parole eligible Afghans are in the visa process, flights to Dulles airport for relocation have been frozen indefinitely due to the State Department's [prioritization of evacuating American citizens](#) from the country. Commercial flights out of Afghanistan have been halted. Most border crossings are manned by Taliban checkpoints, making land evacuation impossible. Hundreds of thousands of Afghan people have been displaced, and tens of thousands more fear for their lives as the Taliban begins its fundamentalist rule over the country.

Scenes of the Kabul airport are reminiscent of the U.S. evacuation of Saigon in 1975, as Afghan men, women and children are reportedly desperately trying to get in the air to flee the country. As Taliban forces surround the perimeter of the airport, and American and Turkish military forces attempt to mitigate the chaos inside, Afghan civilians are caught in limbo. However, unlike Saigon, where [5,000 Vietnamese allies](#) were evacuated via helicopter, and around 130,000 more were taken into the United States as refugees over the course of a month, U.S.-affiliated Afghans, aside from the approximately 2,000 who have been processed at Fort Lee, Virginia over the past two weeks, do not seem to have a viable pathway to safety at this time. Helicopter evacuations are not happening, there is no planned relocation to a [U.S. territory such as Guam](#), and Afghans and their families who risked their lives for the American cause are being left behind.

### **Evacuation and Airport Security are Paramount**

UUSCRI calls for the Administration to do everything in its power to facilitate evacuations for every single American-affiliated Afghan. That requires keeping the Kabul Airport open and secure, and allowing Afghans to get on planes regardless of the documentation they may have on their person. Afghans like Suneeta's children must be brought to safety – whether that is to a third country like Kosovo, Albania, Qatar, or Kuwait, to a U.S. territory, or to the mainland United States. All necessary processing of visas can happen once our allies are out of harm's way. We hope to be welcoming Suneeta's children, and all the other Afghan allies, to the United States with open arms in the coming weeks. While facts and figures are important, this is beyond a numbers game – it is the Administration's responsibility to ensure each of these human lives are safe.

# United States Issue Updates

## • Title 42 Extended Again

On Monday, August 2, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) extended a controversial policy allowing the expulsion of migrants. The policy, known as “Title 42,” allows U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) officials to summarily expel migrants to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in detention facilities—including for migrants who claim asylum or would claim asylum. Public health experts have repeatedly criticized the policy as having no underlying public-health basis. To read the CDC announcement, click [here](#).

## • State Department Announces Afghan P-2 Program

On Monday, August 2, the State Department announced the designation of a Priority 2 (P-2) visa program for Afghans who worked for United States contractors or other entities. Eligible Afghans are those who worked under sub-grants or cooperative agreements with U.S. contractors, for U.S.-based NGOs, or for media organizations. However, because the application process can only be initiated by the employer of the individual and must be completed outside of the individual’s country of origin, many otherwise eligible individuals will not have access to the program or to safe harbor. To read the State Department’s fact sheet on the P-2 designation, click [here](#).

## • Judge Blocks Texas Executive Order that Bans Transporting Migrants

On Tuesday, August 3, the Western District Court of Texas blocked an earlier executive order by Texas Governor Greg Abbott that restricts the transport of migrants by private individuals, non-profit organizations, and companies. Judge Kathleen Cardone of the Western District of Texas wrote that Abbott’s order appears to “conflict with, and pose an obstacle to, federal immigration law” and thereby violate the Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution. The U.S. government contracts out much transport of migrants, including the transport of unaccompanied children. To read the order, click [here](#).

## • USCIS Extends TPS Registration for Venezuelans, Burmese, and Syrian Applicants

On Wednesday, August 4, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) published a Notice in the Federal Register that extends the initial registration periods for citizens of Venezuela, Burma, and Syria to file for Temporary Protected Status (TPS). TPS is a temporary immigration status given to individuals who are unable to safely return home due to armed conflict or natural disasters and that permits those individuals to live and work in the United States. For Venezuela citizens, the period to apply for TPS runs from March 9, 2021 – September 9, 2022; for Burmese citizens, the registration period runs from May 25, 2021 – November 25, 2022. For Syrian citizens, only new applicants are eligible—not redesignations; the period for new registrations runs from March 19, 2021 – September 30, 2022. To read the Federal Register Notice, click [here](#).

## • President Biden Designates DED for Hong Kong Residents

On Thursday, August 5, President Joe Biden announced that thousands of Hong Kong residents will be able to remain in the United States for up to 18 months, under an administrative tool known as Deferred Enforced Departure (DED). DED exempts individuals from removal from the U.S. for a designated period but is not an immigration status. President Biden cited “the significant erosion of...rights and freedoms in Hong Kong by the People’s Republic of China” for the decision. Currently citizens of Liberia and Venezuela also have DED protection. To read the White House memorandum, click [here](#).

# United States Issue Updates (Cont'd)

- **USCIS Revises I-485 to Include SSN for Approved Green Cards**

On Monday, August 9, USCIS announced that it has revised form I-485 so that applicants filing for Lawful Permanent Resident status, also commonly known as a green-card status, will be able to apply for a Social Security number (SSN) simultaneously. Previously the two processes were distinct, often leading to confusion among approved applicants. USCIS receives approximately 576,000 I-485 forms each year. To read the announcement, click [here](#).

- **ICE mandates “Victim-Centered Approach” for Non-Citizen Crime Victims**

On Tuesday, August 10, U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement (ICE) announced Directive 11005.3, titled “Using a Victim-Centered Approach with Noncitizen Crime Victims.” The new policy curtails civil immigration-enforcement actions against individuals who have applied for or received victim-based benefits, such as T-visas and U-visas. The Directive supersedes a prior Directive issued in August 2019, which is widely believed to have led to a chilling effect on immigrant communities’ willingness to cooperate with law enforcement after victimization. To read the Directive, click [here](#).

- **Judge Orders Reinstatement of MPP**

On Friday, August 13, Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk of the Northern District of Texas ordered the Biden Administration to reinstate the so-called “Migrant Protection Protocols” (MPP), also known as the “Remain in Mexico” program. Implemented under the prior Administration, MPP forced applicants for asylum to wait for their cases to proceed in Mexico. Judge Kacsmaryk said that the Biden Administration had violated the Administrative Procedure Act due to a failure to consider “the importance of deterring meritless asylum applications.” Research on MPP has failed to demonstrate any deterrence effect. Read the decision [here](#).

- **GAO Report: ICE Deported 70 U.S. Citizens between 2015 and 2020**

In late July, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report on U.S. citizens misidentified as foreign nationals and subject to immigration charges. The GAO concluded that ICE arrested 674 potential U.S. citizens, detained 121, and deported 70 between 2015 and 2020, according to available data. However, the GAO also noted that “ICE does not systematically track these encounters” and that neither ICE nor CBP maintain adequate records to determine how many U.S. citizens are improperly arrested, held in immigration custody, or deported. To read the report, click [here](#).



# Around the World in International Migration

## • EU Countries Split over Halting Deportations to Afghanistan

Last week, six European Union (EU) countries, including Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, and the Netherlands, sent a letter to the EU's executive branch urging intensified talks with the Afghan government to ensure that EU countries can continue deporting Afghan nationals. However, this week Germany and the Netherlands both halted deportations of Afghans, noting that the situation in Afghanistan is too volatile and changing too quickly to justify continued deportations at this time. The pause is only meant to be temporary, as EU countries worry that a soft stance on deportations could lead to a mass influx of migrants that would strain infrastructure.

## • Conflict Continues to Evolve and Escalate in Ethiopia

The conflict in Ethiopia is constantly evolving and escalating. This week, the Oromo Liberation Army, a breakaway faction of the Oromo Liberation Front, has allied with the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) against the Ethiopian central government. Meanwhile, just weeks after declaring a unilateral ceasefire, the Ethiopian government is now calling on "all capable Ethiopians" to join forces to fight off the TDF. Tensions are continuing to mount, as at least 50 bodies of ethnic Tigrayans with axe wounds and their hands tied behind their backs have begun washing up on the shores of Sudan. Ethiopia and Sudan, already at odds about the Grand Ethiopia Renaissance Dam, have renewed fighting in a disputed border region between the two countries as Tigrayan refugees continue to flee across the border. Concerns are mounting of the potential for a full-scale regional war.

## • Japan Promises Immigration Reform After Young Woman Dies in Detention

The March death of Wishma Sandamali, a young Sri Lankan woman in a Japanese immigration detention center, sparked outrage. Last week Japan apologized, citing a report that concluded the woman's death was in part due to inadequate healthcare in the center. Sandamali, who was detained after seeking police help to escape an abusive relationship, continually complained of stomach pains and other symptoms. Her pleas were largely ignored, and she passed away in detention after months of neglect. Japan has promised to investigate reforms to its immigration system, and proposed legislation that would have made it easier to deport asylum seekers was recently dropped in response to protests surrounding Sandamali's death.



## USCRI in Action

Last week, USCRI released two papers detailing the plight of Tigrayans and Eritrean refugees in the conflict in Ethiopia. The first paper, [Ethnic Cleansing or Genocide?](#), analyzes whether a genocide is occurring against the Tigrayans, and argues that the international community must act immediately to prevent further atrocities. The second paper, [Cornered by Conflict](#), discusses the plight of the Eritrean refugees who have been caught in the middle of the conflict, and who have faced forced returns by Eritrean troops and other human rights abuses at the hands of various armed actors. This paper advocates for these Eritrean refugees to be prioritized for humanitarian aid and resettlement in a safe third country.

## Upcoming Meetings & Events

### **The Golden Hour: Meeting Refugee Clients with Humanity, Awareness, and Resources – Aug. 17**

On Tuesday, August 17 at 3:00 PM EST, join RAICES to learn more about the U.S. refugee resettlement program. The training will discuss how to increase familiarity with and access to refugee-specific programming in communities. For more information and to register, [click here](#).

### **The Immigrant Experience in Our Local Communities – Aug. 23**

On Monday, August 23 at 6:00 PM EST, join several Florida-based coalitions to hear personal stories from recent Spanish-speaking immigrants to the United States, and the struggles they have experienced in their new environments. For more information and to register, [click here](#).

### **Here to Welcome: The First 30 Days of a Refugee – Aug. 26**

On Thursday, August 26 at 1:00 PM EST, join World Relief for an information session on what a refugee's first month in America is like. The session will also discuss common misconceptions about asylum-seekers and how to make immigrants feel welcome. For more information and to register, [click here](#).

**Click here to donate today!**

Interested in joining the USCRI team? [Click here](#) for current job openings!

If you have any questions or comments, please contact the Policy and Advocacy Division at [policy@uscrimail.org](mailto:policy@uscrimail.org).