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Afghan Allies in Limbo: Discrimination in the U.S. Immigration Response

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Abstract

After the fall of Kabul in August 2021, the U.S. government airlifted an estimated 120,000 people to safety from Afghanistan. An airlift of this scale was unprecedented, but also woefully inadequate as a solution to the Afghan humanitarian crisis. This article analyzes the United States' immigration response to the Afghan humanitarian crisis following the Taliban takeover. While the U.S. granted humanitarian parole for two years to approximately 76,000 individuals permitting them to enter the United States, along with creating a new category of priority for refugee processing for Afghans, the government and Congress to date have failed to follow through on logical and stable pathways to permanent immigration status for our Afghan allies. The U.S. has failed the Afghans airlifted to the United States by neglecting to pass an Afghan Adjustment Act and forcing Afghans through the dysfunctional and delayed Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) process or the backlogged and re-traumatizing asylum system. Similarly, the government's handling of the estimated 66,000 humanitarian parole applications filed on behalf of Afghans still trapped in Afghanistan or in the region has been nothing short of abysmal. Approval rates plummeted after the end of August 2021 and the U.S. government took in over \$25 million in fees for applications that have since languished for now close to a year. In contrast, the U.S. created an innovative and expeditious process for the reception of Ukrainian refugees – eliminating hurdles and barriers still in place for Afghans and facilitating the admission of over 150,000 Ukrainians into the United States. Months later, the U.S. created a special process for humanitarian parole for Venezuelans, and then later Cubans, Nicaraguans, and Haitians. This article situates the disparate treatment of Afghans and Ukrainians as one of the latest episodes in the long history of racism in the creation, execution, and implementation of immigration policy in the United States. The stark contrast in treatment for Ukrainians and Afghans underscores the need for an end to biased decision-making and to truly welcome those fleeing violence and conflict with a principled and impartial immigration system, grounded in humanitarian principles.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Humanitarian Immigration, Immigration, Asylum, Ukraine, Parole, Humanitarian Parole, International[Suggested Citation](#) >[Show Contact Information](#) >

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