

Refugee Assistance

By: Jennifer Proto, Principal Analyst
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Issue

Summarize the programs and public assistance that Afghan refugees are eligible to receive in Connecticut.

Summary

Under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), a refugee is an alien who, generally, has experienced past persecution or has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. People who meet this definition may be considered for either [refugee status](#) if they are outside the United States, or [asylum status](#) if they are already in the United States. To qualify for asylum, the person must meet the legal definition of a refugee. Only those granted asylum (vs. with a pending application) are eligible for assistance.

In general, Afghan evacuees legally enter the United States under two main immigration categories:

- [Special Immigrant Visa](#) (SIV): Afghans granted a SIV have worked for the U.S. mission in Afghanistan for at least one year (e.g., as translators and interpreters) or are the spouse or an unmarried child under the age of 21 of these people. SIVs are admitted as Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs, also known as U.S. green card holders) and are eligible for the same benefits and services as a refugee, from the first day of arrival.
- [Parolees](#): Parolees are Afghans who were evacuated for urgent humanitarian reasons and paroled (rather than admitted) on a case-by-case basis into the country. As parolees, they are eligible to apply for [\(1\) work authorization and \(2\) asylum](#) upon arrival in the U.S. and any other immigration benefit for which they may be eligible, including in some cases adjustment to LPR status.

Refugees selected for resettlement through the U.S. Department of State (DOS) Refugee Admissions Program are eligible for [Reception and Placement](#) (R&P) assistance, [unlike asylees](#), who arrive in the U.S. on their own. This one-time payment per refugee is paid directly to resettlement agencies to assist with basic need expenses during their first 30-90 days in the country.

After R&P assistance ends, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) provides state agencies and non-profits with additional funds to provide newly settled refugees with temporary transitional assistance such as cash assistance, medical assistance, job training, and other support services. ORR-funded cash and medical assistance are limited to a maximum of eight months from their date of eligibility (i.e., entrance date). For most employment services and other services aimed at economic self-sufficiency, the eligibility period is five years from this date.

In Connecticut, the Department of Social Services' (DSS) Office of Community Services is responsible for overseeing the state [refugee assistance program](#) ([CGS § 17b-2](#)). In addition to providing cash and medical assistance, DSS contracts with five resettlement agencies to provide case management, employment assistance, and other support services to settled refugees. These agencies include:

1. [Catholic Charities](#) Migration, Refugee and Immigration Services;
2. [Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants](#);
3. [Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services](#);
4. [Jewish Federation of CT, Inc.](#); and
5. Connecticut Coalition of Mutual Assistance Association, Inc.

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH), through its [Refugee and Immigrant Health Program](#) (RIHP), provides health assessments, follow-ups, referrals, and community-based health education to newly settled refugees. RIHP is offered in addition to the initial health screening refugees are required to undergo before entering the United States.

Evacuees may also be eligible for federal "mainstream" (non-ORR funded) benefits in their state, such as cash assistance through Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), health insurance through Medicaid, and food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Cash Assistance

When refugees first arrive in the U.S., they are eligible for 30-90 days of R&P assistance. R&P funds flow directly from DOS to the resettlement agencies. In addition, refugees meeting certain income and asset requirements can get eight months of Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), with benefits based on the state’s TANF payment schedule. However, if the state determines that they are eligible for TANF-funded cash or SSI, they would get these latter benefits instead of RCA. (Most refugee families with children qualify for non-refugee-specific benefits, such as TANF-funded cash and Medicaid.)

Refugees may also be eligible for SNAP, subject to time and eligibility restrictions. Table 1 details the three major cash assistance programs refugees may be eligible for, along with associated time limits.

Table 1: Federal Eligibility Rules for Assistance Programs

<i>Program</i>	<i>Refugee Eligibility under Federal Law</i>
SSI for elderly, blind, and disabled	Eligible for seven years after entry
TANF	Eligible for five years after entry (longer at state option)
SNAP	Eligible without time limits

Source: Congressional Research Service

Non-Citizen Health Coverage Options

Afghan evacuees can access health insurance through Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the Health Insurance Marketplace, or Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) (RMA benefits generally mirror Medicaid coverage and are administered through state Medicaid programs in most states).

Afghans who enter the U.S. under either immigration category (SIV or parolee) are eligible for Medicaid or CHIP to the same extent as refugees, without a five-year waiting period, if they meet other eligibility requirements (e.g., income) for coverage in the state, until [March 31, 2023](#), or the term of parole granted to the evacuee, whichever is later. These Afghan parolees are considered “qualified non-citizens” for purposes of Medicaid and CHIP eligibility since they are eligible for the same benefits as refugees.

Afghans who are ineligible for Medicaid or CHIP may be eligible for RMA for up to eight months following the date of entry in the community (e.g., the date on which the Afghan evacuee departs the military base), if they meet the RMA income and eligibility requirements.

Afghans who are ineligible for Medicaid, CHIP, or RMA and do not have other coverage (e.g., employer-sponsored insurance) may also be eligible for Marketplace coverage with financial assistance.

For additional information, this [ORR webpage](#) provides links to resources and contacts to support Afghans. Benefit fact sheets for [Afghan SIV Holders](#) and [Afghan Humanitarian Parolees](#) may also be helpful.

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