



The Private Sector and the Afghan Crisis: Guidance for Action

Introduction: A Moment of Crisis

Over the next 12 months, the Biden Administration estimates that about 95,000 Afghan evacuees will have arrived in the U.S.¹ With the U.S. refugee resettlement system facing an unprecedented challenge to resettle tens of thousands of Afghans and ensure their basic needs are met, the American business community has a responsibility to create economic opportunities for our Afghan allies so they can rebuild their lives with dignity. This is a critical opportunity for employers to step up to help Afghans reach economic stability by quickly placing those who are readily seeking employment, and extending training and resources to others in need.



**~100,000
Expected
Arrivals**

Many Afghans bring international credentials, high levels of English proficiency, and professional skill sets, yet they face numerous barriers on their journey to gainful employment. To date, Upwardly Global (UpGlo) has touched over 2,000 Afghan and Iraqi translators, interpreters, engineers, and embassy clerks who came to the U.S. as Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) recipients, many of whom have successfully continued careers in fields including **engineering, healthcare, construction, and technology**.

By engaging our network of over 55 employers over the last two years, we have honed in on the key barriers faced both by jobseekers on the road to employment and by employers when sourcing, recruiting, and integrating diverse talent. We are actively working to remove these barriers, build pathways, and guide companies to hire, train, and mentor internationally-trained immigrants and refugees. The American business community has a vital role to play in the current Afghan humanitarian crisis, and Upwardly Global is well-positioned to not only empower newly arrived Afghans, but to engage employers who want to take action. **Here is how.**

1. Migration Policy Institute, "[Commentary on Afghan Evacuees](#)".

Barriers & Challenges

Internationally-trained professionals (ITPs) face barriers throughout the job search process from recruitment and interviewing to onboarding and advancement.² Upon arrival, they may not know how to navigate the U.S. labor market, understand where their skills fit in, or what roles they are qualified for. ITPs who come from industries with heavy licensing requirements, such as healthcare, may need support in re-licensing or re-/up-skilling to stay competitive.

Despite having years of professional experience, the current support system for new arrivals encourages “rapid-attachment” jobs, which are oftentimes entry-level positions, underutilizing their many skills and leading to “brain waste” and lost wages.³ Newcomers often lack professional networks, which can stymie their professional advancement, since 85% of jobs are secured through social networks and “word of mouth” referrals.⁴ This lack of U.S.-based networks may pose challenges during the interview process when a candidate is asked for references.

Moreover, ITPs are often not aware of cultural norms in U.S. workplaces such as the use of eye contact or the American way of “storytelling” and self-promotion during the interview process if they have come from collective cultures. This can lead employers to believe candidates lack confidence or assertiveness.



2. See Upwardly Global's [Jobseeker Journey Map](#).

3. Center for American Progress, "[Progress 2050: New Ideas for a Diverse America](#)".

4. LinkedIn, "[New Survey Reveals 85% of All Jobs are Filled Via Networking](#)".

Practices in recruitment and hiring can at times unintentionally perpetuate unconscious bias, adding to the challenges ITPs face. For example, online application forms with mandatory fields that do not include foreign institutions can prevent a jobseeker from even applying. Employers may not consider ITPs due to confusion about work authorization, difficulty translating foreign degrees and credentials, or challenges evaluating international work experience. Refugees may display gaps in their resume, which is often cause for recruiters to automatically screen a candidate out, without considering that the candidate may be fleeing persecution (and what resiliency and problem-solving skills one gains during that experience!). Additionally, phone interviews are a huge barrier for ITPs, due to language differences and accents, as well as the inability to use or properly evaluate body language.

What is Important to Know About Afghan Refugees & SIVs

As we are faced with a new and important challenge of integrating thousands of new Afghans into our country and workforce, here is key information that the business community needs to know:



All Afghans will be fully work authorized. Some Afghans will arrive as SIVs or Parole 1 or 2 categories (refugees). The SIV Program was designed for Afghans and Iraqis who have served the U.S. government, and because of that service, are at risk. These visas allow these allies to resettle in the United States and grant them work authorization.

Tens of thousands of Afghan arrivals will have work authorization, but the categories are complicated and companies who want to support the population - and access the talent they bring - must be willing to think outside of the box (see examples below).

Those on humanitarian parole will be eligible for Employment Authorization Documents (EADs). This status offers temporary work authorization. We encourage companies to hire based on this temporary status, and help advocate for the quick processing of newcomers, and a timely shift from temporary to permanent status.



SIVs are highly trained. The majority of SIVs are college educated and/or highly skilled. Afghan SIVs can differ slightly from typical refugees in this regard. They are great candidates for mid- to high- skilled roles. **SIVs are amongst UpGlo's fastest placing job seekers.** Due to their strong technical skills, English language proficiency, and experience working with U.S. employers - oftentimes the U.S. military or its allies - SIVs are able to rapidly adapt to American workplaces once in the U.S.



UpGlo's jobseekers are driven and loyal. **90% of UpGlo program participants, including SIVs, are retained 1 year after hire into internships or full-time employment.**



While many have high skill levels, we know they will **need digital skills, essential or soft skills training, and some English language support.** Soft skills are just as important as "hard" technical skills in hiring. Employers should be upfront and explicit about the soft skills that are valued in the hiring process and workforce, and support soft skill training programs. Many Afghan SIVs and other new arrivals speak English and are digitally literate, but not all are digitally fluent. This highlights an opportunity for employers, government programs, and nonprofits to provide more support to ensure success.

MEET ARMAND*



Armand is an IT Project Manager from Afghanistan who joined Upwardly Global during the summer of 2020. After enrolling in the program, he received support in enrolling in a Project Management Professional (PMP) prep course, giving him the knowledge and confidence to stand out in the job market. After six months of hard work, support, and coaching, Armand finally landed a job as a Business Analyst with a technology company based in Maryland.

**Name changed for privacy reasons*

What Employers Can Do



HIRE. Build special hiring initiatives and be open to different hiring processes such as paid job shadowing, returnships and apprenticeships that give new arrivals U.S. workforce experience and a chance to prove themselves. This could include special assistance for Afghan refugees/SIVs in the hiring process and HR training on what recruiters can expect.



INTERNSHIPS/RETURNSHIPS. Offer paid, short-term professional opportunities that allow the company to get familiar with job seekers, and allow job seekers to gain exposure to U.S. workplace cultures. This opportunity helps build adaptive-skills and U.S. industry experience for their résumés. See examples below.



TRAINING. If your company offers a training that helps open up career pathways in a particular industry (i.e. Google and Google Python), make that training available to job seekers through our skilling offerings, prioritizing access to Afghan/SIV immigrants first.



MENTORSHIP/VOLUNTEERISM. Commit company employees to mentor Afghan refugees through this transition, and into gainful employment. Culturally attuned corporate volunteers are critical to job training and successful workforce and societal integration. For Afghan SIVs, key allies include veteran groups who have experience with and deep care for this community. Upwardly Global's volunteer programs have created a pool of thousands of individuals within companies who are internal advocates and external mentors to newcomers.



WIDESPREAD INTEGRATION & TOP LEVEL COMMITMENT. Companies aren't typically set up to ensure Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) objectives and practices are owned and implemented widely across the whole organization. There could be a tendency to view DEI as the responsibility of HR, or a specialist team, rather than integrating these principles into wider business management.

It is vital for immigrants and refugees to have allies within companies at all levels. Leadership buy-in and tangible commitments --like those of Accenture's leaders --must be balanced with implementation level buy-in to successfully move the bar on immigrant and refugee hiring.



BRANDING & MESSAGING. Use your channels and leadership to speak out on the value of these new arrivals to our economy and communities, and encourage peers in the industry to do so as well.



DONATE. Support UpGlo's Afghan crisis response efforts. **Click here** to learn more or contact us.



Upwardly Global Partners & Collaborators Leading the Way

In response to the emerging humanitarian crisis, we convened our DEI Employer Working Group of nearly 60 employers for an emergency briefing to orient the private sector to the dire situation in Afghanistan, what to expect on American soil, and how employers have the unique ability to activate their resources and open their pipelines to this population.⁵

The response from the companies was great, and we are now actively engaging over 35 corporations to explore ways to support Afghan arrivals -- including co-designing special hiring, training, mentorship/volunteering, and intern/return-ships initiatives. We are encouraged by the efforts of many of our employer partners to take action -- such as swiftly adapting veteran hiring models to include this incoming population. We'd like to highlight some leading examples and models led by some of our new and longstanding UpGlo employer partners to transform the lives of Afghan newcomers and the broader immigrant and refugee community.

Leading Practices

Amazon Military Affairs

UpGlo is working with Amazon's Veteran Recruiting team on an upcoming special three-part initiative in which we will be addressing barriers and challenges both for UpGlo jobseekers, and Amazon recruiting teams. Amazon will be sharing vital information with Upwardly Global's job coaches on how to best support UpGlo's SIV jobseekers, and those who served alongside our military, in finding, applying, and interviewing for Amazon jobs. UpGlo, in turn, will be sharing key information with Amazon recruiters on what to expect when screening, interviewing, and hiring SIV and refugee jobseekers. This initiative will culminate with a special event in October 2021, during which Amazon's veteran recruiters will be meeting directly with UpGlo SIV and refugee jobseekers for an information session about their open roles and recruitment process.

Amazon Returnship Program

The [Amazon Returnship Program](#) was designed with a “life happens” approach to support returners who might have left the workforce due to Covid-19, family circumstances, or relocation to a new country. This 16-week paid initiative provides a structured environment through which returners receive work assignments that help them reintegrate into the workforce and acclimate to Amazon’s peculiar ways. Subject to performance and feedback throughout the returnship program, qualified candidates may be offered full-time employment at Amazon.

UpGlo is organizing a special hiring initiative event in October with Amazon returnship recruiters where we will bring together a select cohort of UpGlo candidates with Amazon recruiters for the open role of Business Analyst.

Google

Upwardly Global has implemented a “deep digital skilling” model with support from Google.org to make the [Google Career Certificates](#) more effective for our population of immigrant and refugee professionals (measured by increased program completion and time to completion, as well as enhanced quality of experience, and stronger placement outcomes).

Our cohorts incorporate two overarching elements: (1) cohort based learning - we gather job seekers undergoing the course in the same time period into cohorts. While the learning is individual, these meetings meaningfully enhance a sense of peer-peer support and enhance course learning; and (2) Volunteer Mentoring - we engage Google volunteers as mentors to provide guidance and learning support. Currently, we are actively working with 125 job seekers with Googler mentors/volunteers to offer Google Career Certificates which has been a valuable part of UpGlo's Afghan response. This collaborative 4-5 month program launched in mid 2021 with 5 cohorts who we are assisting together, and preparing for U.S. workforce integration.

LinkedIn

Our partnership with LinkedIn extends from everything to regular volunteer engagement to emergency response. Most recently, LinkedIn mobilized quickly to help UpGlo assist Afghan program participants as they start the process of job searching, resume building, and soft skills training. Volunteers from LinkedIn also lend their time to UpGlo jobseekers annually with mock interviews and other 1:1 opportunities. The company is an active participant and leader in the UpGlo DEI Employer Working Group.

Microsoft

Microsoft Career Connector is a new service to connect skilled job seekers to employers with tech and tech-enabled job opportunities. Working together with nonprofit partners like UpGlo that support diverse talent and employers, this platform acts as a concierge recruitment service. UpGlo is one of only five nonprofit partners who work with underrepresented populations to actively sourcing candidates for the Career Connector platform.

NewYork-Presbyterian

Upwardly Global is partnering with NewYork-Presbyterian, one of the nation's leading academic healthcare systems, to pilot a paid internship model. UpGlo is working with NewYork-Presbyterian to place up to 100 immigrant and refugee candidates into roles supporting vaccine efforts and clinical and administrative functions. Job seekers will gain real-life work experiences in a professional U.S. setting, while receiving ongoing mentorship and support from NewYork-Presbyterian employees, further building out their networks and technical skills and developing their employability. Currently, there are 30 UpGlo Interns throughout the hospitals and medical groups and over 24 different languages spoken with some interns being multilingual.

NBCUniversal

NBCUniversal is committed to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and has created custom DEI strategies and initiatives for various business lines across the organization. One of their objectives is to create diverse talent pipeline programs which identify and engage creative talent from a wide array of backgrounds. Working closely with NBCU's ad sales division, UpGlo is actively building out a hiring partnership to demonstrate the value of internationally-trained immigrants and refugees -including Afghans- as part of a NBCU's DEI strategy.

Workday

[Opportunity Onramps](#) - Workday's workforce development movement, provides training, internships and opportunities to job seekers from non traditional backgrounds. The programs vary in length from 4-6 months long, with a competitive hourly wage, with the goal of hiring full-time assuming performance aligns with expectations. Participants are paired with volunteer mentors through Employee Belonging Councils to offer professional development. Feedback to participants is formalized to ensure that delivering direct messages are encouraged, so participants have feedback in order to understand how to grow. Workday has committed to hiring 20% of their early to mid-career talent in the US through Opportunity Onramps and hiring happens throughout the year and across cities in the US with global expansion this year to Dublin, Ireland. UpGlo has a talent partnership with Workday to actively recruit finance and IT professionals for the Opportunity Onramps program.

About Us

UpGlo is the only national non-profit organization dedicated to integrating foreign-trained immigrants and refugees, including Afghan refugees and SIVs, into the U.S. workforce. These newcomers face [barriers](#) at each step of the job search process including lack of professional networks, resume gaps, and often compounding factors due to their race and immigrant status (75% of UpGlo jobseekers identify with communities of color). At the same time, employers face another set of unique challenges in filling [five million open roles](#), [skills shortages](#), and recruiting and hiring diverse talent. Based on our experience of working with internationally trained professionals over the last 20 years, we have developed a suite of employer-facing trainings and tools to prepare employers for recruiting, interviewing, and onboarding internationally-trained professionals. These best practices and resources are aimed at moving the mark for more diverse and inclusive workplaces.

To learn more about how business can aid Afghan resettlement and workforce integration or join this growing group, please contact Upwardly Global; [Jennie Murray](#), VP of Programs and [Kim Cohen](#), Director of Employer Engagement.



5. Upwardly Global is engaging corporate America to better understand the roadblocks in hiring foreign talent. Together with partners at Accenture, UpGlo brought together corporate leaders and internationally-trained professionals to envision [corporate facing products- from internships, to an inclusion playbook, to an index](#) - that will change the DEI commitment calculus from a “nice to do” mandate to a “must do” action plan (see [the Executive Summary](#) from this initial work). Launched in 2020, Upwardly Global’s DEI Employer Working Group, made up of over 55 corporations, meets bi-monthly to engage with peers, share best practices for inclusive hiring models, hot tips, resources, challenges, and to co-create solutions to better integrate immigrant and refugee talent into the U.S. workforce.