



# Afghan Newcomers Bring Critical Value to U.S. Economy and Society



**Upwardly Global, in Partnership  
with Evacuate Our Allies**

March 2023

**Since 2021, the U.S. has offered refuge to over 75,000 Afghans who risked their lives to support the U.S. presence in Afghanistan and have been targeted, along with their families, by the resurgent Taliban.**



Recent Afghan newcomers have already begun making meaningful contributions to the U.S. economy and society. We can and must enable and support them in rebuilding their lives through much needed private, community, philanthropic, state, and federal support. It is critical that we ensure their continued right to stay in the U.S. through passage of new legislation and administrative action. With the visa statuses of many newcomers expiring after two years, about 36,000 Afghans will face uncertainty from falling out of status.

This paper shares key areas of Afghan newcomer contributions to date — and their immense future potential — by spotlighting four distinct groups: 1) Afghan professionals filling labor market gaps, 2) Afghan women leaders and human rights defenders, 3) Afghans who are reinvigorating communities, and 4) Afghan students. Upwardly Global produced this report in partnership with Evacuate Our Allies, a coalition consisting of over 150 organizations working to support the resettlement of at-risk Afghans.





**41,040**

Estimated number of Afghan newcomers who are working age adults, as of August 2022  
(International Rescue Committee)



**\$1.71 billion**

Potential annual earnings of Afghan newcomers  
(International Rescue Committee and Upwardly Global)

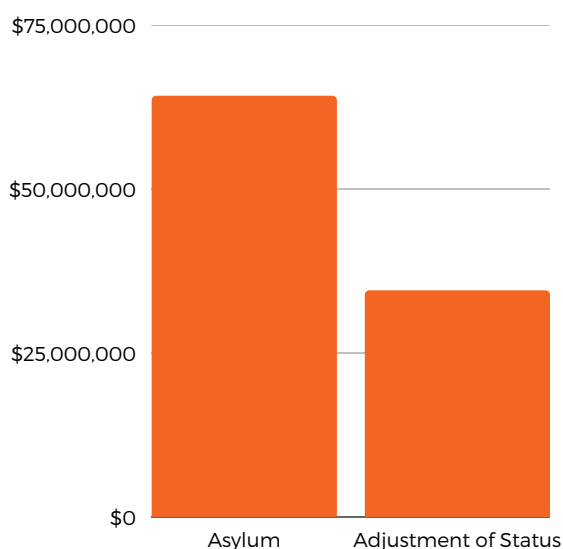


**\$227 million**

Potential taxes paid by Afghan newcomers, estimated using an average federal income tax rate of 13.29%  
(International Rescue Committee and Upwardly Global)

It is critical that tens of thousands of Afghan parolees and individuals here on Temporary Protected Status (TPS) are ensured the right to rebuild their lives in the U.S. This goal can most immediately be obtained through the passage of the Afghan Adjustment Act (AAA) or through related administrative action. With no prospect of being able to relocate and rebuild their lives back home, these individuals should be fully supported in their efforts to positively contribute to their new communities in the U.S.

## Cost Savings of Afghan Adjustment Act (AAA)



It would cost the U.S. government \$64,194,946 for asylum (I-589) adjudication of over 36,000 Afghan cases, compared to only \$34,538,484 for an adjustment of status (I-485) adjudication for the same population under the AAA.

*Data provided by the United States Department of Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Graph provided by Evacuate Our Allies Coalition.*

Status adjustments to permanent residency for Afghans going through the asylum process, which entail processing both forms I-589 and I-485, cost the USCIS a total of \$98,733,430, compared to just \$34,538,484 for AAA adjustments, which do not require this same group to go through the asylum process to obtain permanent residency (Evacuate Our Allies). Ultimately, the AAA produces savings of \$64,194,946.

This work is part of a broader movement to support the inclusion of all immigrants, refugees, and asylees in the U.S., and to help the U.S. recognize the talent that these populations bring to help address fast-moving labor market needs. Between 2010 and 2018, immigrants and their U.S.-born children made up 28% of all U.S. workers, and contributed to 83% of labor force growth. With migration on the rise around the world, the task of supporting relocation remains more pertinent than ever.

## AFGHAN PROFESSIONALS



**10,000+**

Estimated number of Afghan newcomers with college education and professional experience



**28.5%**

Estimated percentage of educated Afghans who hold a master's degree



**5.8%**

Estimated percentage of educated Afghans who have advanced medical training



**\$59,440**

Average starting salary for placed Afghan newcomers.



**\$646 million**

Potential annual earnings if Afghan newcomer professionals are employed in skills-aligned jobs

Last year, Upwardly Global [released new data](#) highlighting the potential economic contributions of newly arrived Afghan professionals within their first year of employment in the U.S. Based on Upwardly Global's in-depth coaching work with over 1,500 Afghans, most were found to have professional and industry work experience on par or above the prerequisite standards for their desired jobs across a range of high-need industries in the U.S. To date, the top industries for the placement of these Afghans are: business logistics and operations (21%), technology (13%), government and nonprofit (13%), finance and accounting (11%), engineering (9%), and healthcare (8%).

U.S. industries in many of these sectors are experiencing labor shortages. Healthcare remains the fastest-growing sector in the U.S. economy — one with drastically unmet labor needs. There are roughly 27 open healthcare practitioner jobs for every unemployed worker ([American Immigration Council](#)), and by 2033, there will be an estimated shortage of up to 139,000 physicians in hospitals around the country ([Association of American Medical Colleges](#)).

Afghan newcomer professionals have been steadily meeting specialized industry demands across the country. Over 100 companies, including many Fortune 500 firms, [have made pledges to hire refugees](#). Upwardly Global is working with dozens to help realize those ambitions, and has supported Afghan hiring directly with partners and issued [best practices and guidance](#). These Afghan newcomer professionals have the potential to contribute even more once they are met with the right additional support.





**Sohaila**, a master's degree holder and trained surgeon, fled the Taliban in Afghanistan for the U.S. Through Upwardly Global and NewYork-Presbyterian's cutting edge paid internship program, Sohaila landed a job as a Data Research Coordinator at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, where she conducts data collection of extracorporeal membrane oxygenation patients. She looks forward to advancing her career through new experience and valuable connections. To read more about Sohaila, click [here](#).



Senior Vice President and Chief People Officer of NewYork-Presbyterian, Shaun Smith, remarked:

*"Upwardly Global plays an important role in ensuring that immigrants, like myself, are not left behind, and have the opportunity to use their talents to support many different industries."*



**Jalal**, a master's in public health degree holder, fled the Taliban in Afghanistan for the U.S. Wanting to fully support his family, he knew that restarting his life and career from scratch would require some help. After being referred to Upwardly Global, Jalal landed a job as a Monitoring and Evaluation Analyst at the Allegheny County Department of Human Services in his new home of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He has now worked there for nearly one year, his family supported by the reliable salary. Jalal shared his story in the press. To read more about Jalal, click [here](#).

**Murtaza** built a successful career as a graduate-level monitoring and evaluation expert in Afghanistan, but his work as a U.S. contractor made him a target for the Taliban. After connecting with Upwardly Global, Murtaza was elated to get a job as a Bilingual Data Analyst for Apple. After this work, he took on a new role as a Sales Operations Lead at Microsoft. Now well experienced, he currently works as a Sales Operation Analyst at Integral Life Sciences. To read more about Murtaza, click [here](#).



## AFGHAN WOMEN LEADERS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

**18,000+**

Estimated number of  
Afghan women who  
came to the U.S. since  
evacuation in 2021

**2 million**

Estimated number of girls in  
Afghanistan to be banned  
from pursuing education  
under the Taliban's  
oppressive new rules

Following the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, hundreds of Afghan women were evacuated to the U.S. Many had played critical roles in the democratic development of Afghanistan. Among the newcomers are lawyers, judges, government and elected officials, and some of the leading human rights defenders in the world.

In just one year, we have seen the Taliban crack down on human rights. In particular, women and girls have systematically been stripped of their rights and freedoms. The Taliban banned girls' education beyond seventh grade, expelling more than 2 million girls from school, and have outlawed women from working outside the home and in national and international NGOs. We have also seen extreme violence against women, including a return to extrajudicial killings, forced marriages, and the disappearances of women politicians, judges, and police officers. Now, women and girls are unable to participate in public life, requiring a male escort just to leave their homes.

In welcoming Afghan newcomers, we protect the voices of many extraordinary rights defenders, activists, and leaders who can contribute immensely to U.S. academic, government, and nongovernmental institutions and to our society at large. Afghan women leaders are also able to continue their courageous work of advocating for women's rights to support those left behind. Organizations like Onward for Afghan Women, an initiative of the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS); Women for Afghan Women; and the George W. Bush Institute are among the leaders in working with Afghan women in this space.





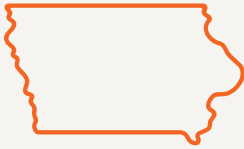
**Kawser** was a member of the first Afghan women's national soccer team. As a young girl interested in soccer, Kawser dreamed of becoming the next Messi or Maradona. Despite the many barriers in Afghanistan for young women interested in pursuing sports, she realized her own dream and also immediately began helping open doors for other female athletes. Upon arriving in the U.S., Kawser embarked on her new career as the Northern California refugee coordinator for the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA). Concurrently, she is working to build an NGO to support and empower women and help refugee children who are seeking to pursue sports. To read Kawser's recent op-ed published in numerous outlets, click [here](#). To read more about Kawser, click [here](#).

Mariam Atash is an Afghan woman, human rights activist, and attorney who is a member of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council. She is also a cofounder of the Afghanistan Advocacy Group. Mariam recently met with Upwardly Global to discuss the plight of Afghan women who have fled the Taliban. She commented:

*"Afghan women have been contributing to this country not just since the arrival of refugees after the U.S. withdrawal in August 2021, but for many decades. Afghan women and girls who arrived in the early 1980's after the Soviet invasion have since gone on to become doctors, attorneys, engineers, fashion designers, pilots, teachers, actresses, computer programmers, musicians, and many other roles. They've also been bridge builders after 9/11, helping to serve as ambassadors of their homeland and adopted country in order to bring greater understanding and peace. The resilience and motivation of Afghan women in the U.S. and other countries where they have become refugees is truly inspiring."*



## AFGHANS REINVIGORATING COMMUNITIES



### 75,000

Job openings in Iowa that could be filled in part by Afghans and other refugees (Iowa Workforce Development)



### 11 million

Jobs open nationwide, as of December 2022 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)

While some Afghans have resettled in major urban areas on the coast, many more are spread across the country, living in suburban and rural areas. These communities have seen significant benefits from the arrival of Afghan newcomers.

In states such as Iowa, companies face labor shortages that leave tens of thousands of jobs unfilled ([The New York Times](#)). Many of these job shortages could be filled through the active inclusion of refugee talent.

Afghan families are eager to build connections and plant real roots in the U.S. They bring intergenerational excitement about resettlement and opportunities to work and contribute. This is a tremendous opportunity for U.S. communities that have been hollowed out in recent decades.

The following profiles and quotes feature Afghan newcomers who have relocated and are helping to reinvigorate communities in the states of Pennsylvania, Arizona, North Carolina, and Georgia, as well as their employers and advocates.

Chris Guthrie, President of Trace Die Cast in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, remarks: "Foundry work has always been filled with immigrants ... Once, they were Italian, German, and Irish. Since the Bosnians arrived in the mid-1990s, Trace Die Cast has been hiring refugees." Refugees now make up half his 400-person workforce, and Guthrie hopes the new Afghans can fill his 80 open positions." ([National Geographic](#))



**Shahpur** was one of the first Black Hawk helicopter pilots for the U.S. military in Afghanistan and was a recipient of a letter of commendation by the late Senator John McCain. He later went on to serve as a captain and squadron commander. After relocating to the U.S., Shahpur landed his current job, working as a flight line technician for a reputable company in Arizona. Additionally, he is a strong candidate for a reskilling and credentialing program to advance his career by becoming a flight dispatcher. Shahpur's story was featured on CNBC's "The News with Shepard Smith" for the one-year anniversary of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. To read more about Shahpur, click [here](#).

**Ahmad**, upon arriving in the U.S. from Afghanistan, resettled in North Carolina with his wife and infant son. Originally specializing in human rights law in Kabul, Ahmad intends to rebuild his legal career in the U.S. However, his professional dreams are on hold while he works in an entry-level shipping and receiving department to provide immediate support to his family. Ahmad is one of hundreds of Afghan newcomers resettled in the North Carolina's Triangle region who are at risk of losing their ability to stay in the U.S. should the Afghan Adjustment Act, or similar legislation, fail to pass. To read more about Ahmad, click [here](#).



Darlene Lynch is the Chair of Business and Immigration for Georgia (BIG) Partnership, Head of External Relations at The Center for Victims of Torture Georgia, and a co-chair of the Coalition of Refugee Service Agencies. In discussing with Upwardly Global how Afghan newcomers contribute to communities across Georgia, Darlene asserted:

*"Georgia boasts one of the oldest and most successful refugee resettlement programs in the nation. Refugees from around the world have made valuable economic, social, and cultural contributions to the state for decades. After the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, Georgia welcomed nearly 2,000 Afghans who brought much-needed skills and talents to our state. They have helped Georgia confront workforce shortages in industries across sectors, from IT to healthcare to manufacturing, and have sparked small-business growth in the local communities that welcomed them. New Americans have always been a source of growth and innovation in the U.S., and we see that happening every day here in Georgia."*

Mindi Cox is the Chief Marketing and People Officer at O.C. Tanner, a global leader in employee recognition and workplace culture based in Salt Lake City, Utah. O.C. Tanner received the Championing Inclusion Award at Upwardly Global's Annual Gala in 2020. In a statement to Upwardly Global, Mindi remarked:

*"At O.C. Tanner, we work every day to build cultures of respect and appreciation in our workplaces. We made a commitment long ago to hire and promote refugees seeking safety in our country and to welcome them fully and completely. It is one of the best business decisions — and human decisions — we have ever made. It is why we are committed to working together with Upwardly Global and moving from the vision of a more inclusive and welcoming America to the reality O.C. Tanner has been so fortunate to experience over the last few decades."*

To read more about O.C. Tanner and their workforce inclusion efforts in Utah, as recognized by Upwardly Global, click [here](#) for a full article by PR Newswire.

## AFGHAN STUDENTS



**3,000**

Estimated number of student-age  
Afghans



**\$165 million**

Potential total annual earnings of  
Afghan students upon graduating  
college

Universities and colleges across the U.S. have begun to open their doors to Afghan newcomers through a variety of new scholarship and enrollment initiatives. Young Afghans are contributing knowledge and experience to student bodies, and gaining broad based learning and deep U.S. networks. Programs for Afghans have been created at Arizona State University, Pomona College, Bard College, and Emory University, to name just a few prestigious institutions that have stepped forward.

After waiting months at a military base in Wisconsin, 61 young Afghan women began their new lives as students at Arizona State University through a resettlement program co-sponsored by the International Rescue Committee ([ASU News](#)). Pomona College is leading the new Global Student Haven Initiative, which seeks to connect Afghan newcomers, and other people denied access to collegiate opportunities, with higher education institutions around the U.S. that can guarantee financial and academic support ([Inside Higher Ed](#)).

Another institution that has made a concerted effort to open its doors to Afghan newcomers is Bard College, whose network includes campuses and programs at Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; Simon's Rock, Massachusetts; and New York City. To date, Bard College has enrolled 58 Afghan newcomer students, and has made a pledge to enroll up to 100 students in their Annandale-on-Hudson campus as well as at Bard College at Simon's Rock, an accredited early college within its network. The following students were recently spotlighted.





Image Credit: Scott Barrow for Bard College

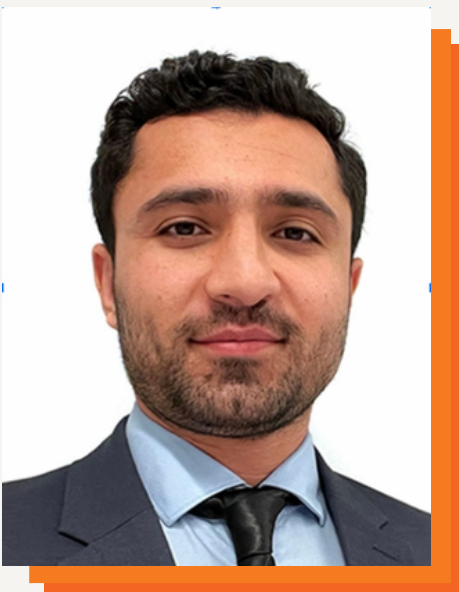


Image Credit: Bard College

**Edris** (Bard College '23) came to Bard last year from Afghanistan. A political science major, Edris has spent the past four years working on peace-building and youth empowerment projects through NGOs in Afghanistan. Edris has trained 240 students through the Model United Nations program and 120 students on peace-building initiatives. He is also a Generation Change fellow at the United States Institute of Peace and is currently interning with the National Committee on American Foreign Policy. Edris was recently the recipient of the prestigious Schwarzman Scholarship, which supports up to 200 scholars annually from around the world for a one-year master's in global affairs. To read more about Edris, click [here](#).





Image Credit: Bard College

**Sonita** (Bard College '23) is a human rights and music double major who came to Bard four years ago from Afghanistan. Sonita has spoken and performed at United Nations events with a focus on highlighting women's and girls' rights. Sonita is one of two Bard students to win a Rhodes Scholarship, one of the most prestigious scholarships available to undergraduates, for 2023. She will embark on fully funded postgraduate studies at the University of Oxford in the fall. To read more about Sonita, click [here](#).

In a message to his colleagues in the President's Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, Jonathon Becker, Executive Vice President and Professor of Political Studies at Bard, shared these statements on Edris, Sonita, and the Afghan students across the Bard College system:

*"I think this news is worth sharing because [it highlights] the importance of what we are doing and the worthiness of the displaced people we are supporting ... Needless to say, all of these awards are unbelievably competitive .... I think this is a great indication of the value, talent, and merit of the students with whom we are working and a signal of the need for our program and programs like it."*



This paper has brought light to just a few of the incredible stories and statistics around Afghans who have come to the U.S. since the rollout of Operation Allies Welcome (OAW). To reiterate, as many as 36,000 Afghans are threatened by the deadlines on their legal status. We urge Congress to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act in order to offer the stability that Afghans, as well as their employers and neighbors, need. Short of congressional action, the administration can and should immediately move to extend parolee and TPS deadlines.

We cannot send Afghans back. By delaying the process of adjusting their status, we are imposing not only cruel uncertainty to individuals and families who have suffered so much already, but also continue to impede their ability to be included and contribute to our society. The time to act is now.

We would like to acknowledge the following organizations and institutions for their continued work in supporting Afghan newcomers, among other disadvantaged immigrant, refugee, and asylee populations, across the country:

***Afghan-American Foundation, Afghanistan Advocacy Group, Afghanistan Relief Alliance, Afghans for a Better Tomorrow, American Immigration Council, Arizona State University, Bard College, Center for Victims of Torture, Church World Services, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights, Coalition of Refugee Service Agency, Center for Victims of Torture, Elena's Light, Emory University, Evacuate Our Allies Coalition, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, George W. Bush Institute, Georgia State University, Human Rights First, the IMPRINT coalition, International Orphan Care, International Rescue Committee, National Immigration Forum, NewYork-Presbyterian, Nooristan Foundation, O.C. Tanner, Pomona College, Refugee Council U.S.A., U.S. Afghan Women's Council, Uplift Afghanistan Fund, Welcoming America, Welcome.US, Women for Afghan Women, World Education Services.***





## About Upwardly Global and Evacuate Our Allies

**Upwardly Global** (team pictured above), a nonprofit with offices in San Francisco, New York City, Chicago, and the Washington, D.C., area, is the first and longest-serving organization dedicated to advancing the inclusion of immigrant and refugee professionals into the U.S. workforce. With a leadership team that includes experts in diversity hiring, workforce development, and women's empowerment, we work to build out career pathways and thriving-wage employment to support wealth building for low-income, underserved refugee, immigrant, and asylee professionals across the country through innovative and responsive direct service, employer engagement and partnerships, and capacity building and train-the-trainer work with other frontline immigrant and workforce organizations. To learn more, please visit [upwardlyglobal.org](https://upwardlyglobal.org).

**Evacuate Our Allies** is a coalition of trusted human rights, religious, and refugee organizations working alongside veterans and frontline civilians to relocate, welcome, and support the resettlement of as many at-risk Afghans as possible. To learn more, please visit [evacuateourallies.org](https://evacuateourallies.org).