



Annual Report 2021

*We enrich the vitality of community by
helping immigrants achieve an empowered
life with dignity, connection, and belonging*

A Message From The Executive Director

Over the past year, the world has weathered a global COVID-19 pandemic and a refugee crisis in Afghanistan. Despite these challenges, The International Institute of Akron remains steadfast in our commitment to serving immigrants and refugees.

U.S. troops withdrew from Afghanistan last August, ending two decades of war. However, as the last American plane lifted off from Kabul, the conflict was far from over for the Afghan people. The withdrawal led to the displacement of 2.6 million people, whose lives were uprooted as they fled violence and human rights abuses.

With your support in 2021, we resettled 269 refugees and 155 parolees from Afghanistan, Syria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition, we provided \$50,000 in emergency assistance to refugees for rent, utilities, and food. From our legal team to our ESL teachers to our interpreters, everyone played a role in helping refugees and immigrants navigate this new chapter of their lives. Seventy-seven individuals gained U.S. citizenship, and an additional 122 people received lawful permanent resident (LPR) status. Each of these numbers represents our immigrant and refugee communities' strength, courage, and resilience.

We couldn't have achieved these accomplishments without our donors, supporters, and volunteers. Thank you for your commitment to uplifting immigrants and refugees. Even in difficult times, there is always light as long as there is kindness and hope. Together, we can continue to serve and empower those who immigrate or resettle in the United States.

Sincerely,

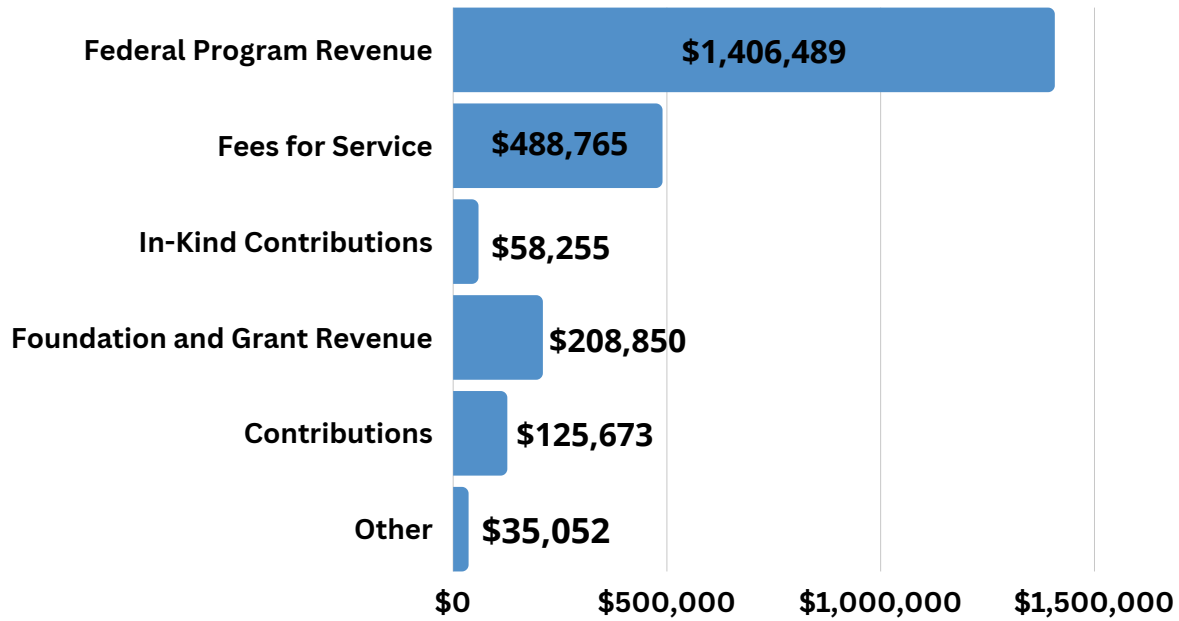


Madhu Sharma
Executive Director

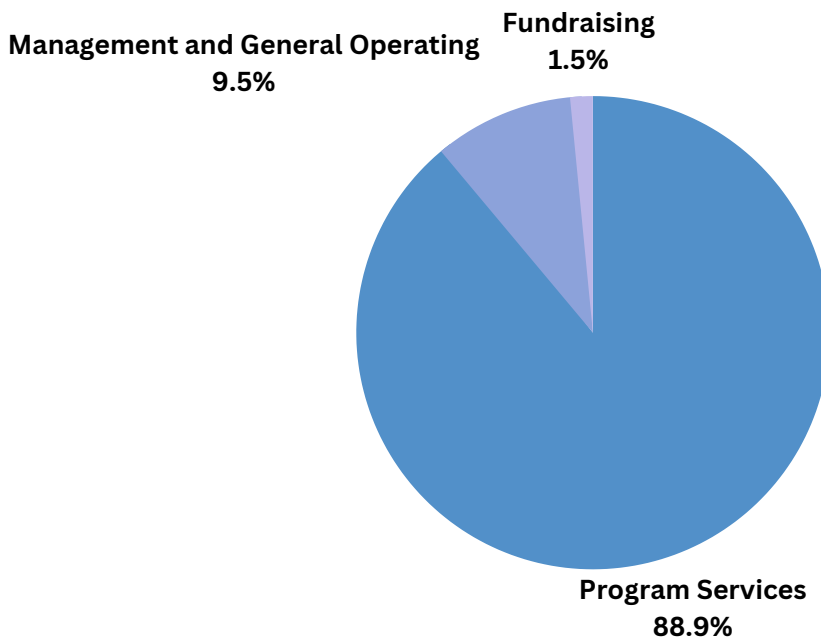


2021

Financials



Total 2021 Revenue: \$2,323,084



Total 2021 Expenses: \$2,212,995

A Note To Our Donors

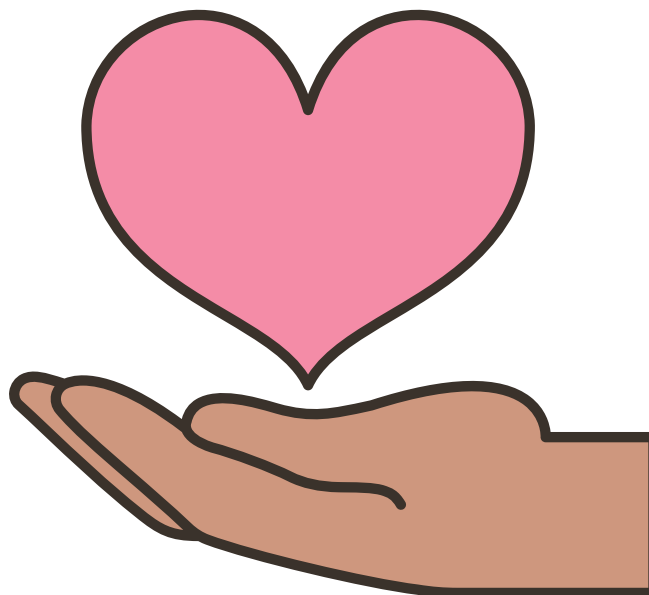
In 2021, IIA saw an outpour of love and support from our supporters. The moment the humanitarian crisis began in Afghanistan and IIA began resettling Afghan parolees, community members, donors, and volunteers began reaching out to see what they could do to help.

Their support was critical to IIA's ability to rebuild our programming and resettle hundreds of Afghans in Akron.

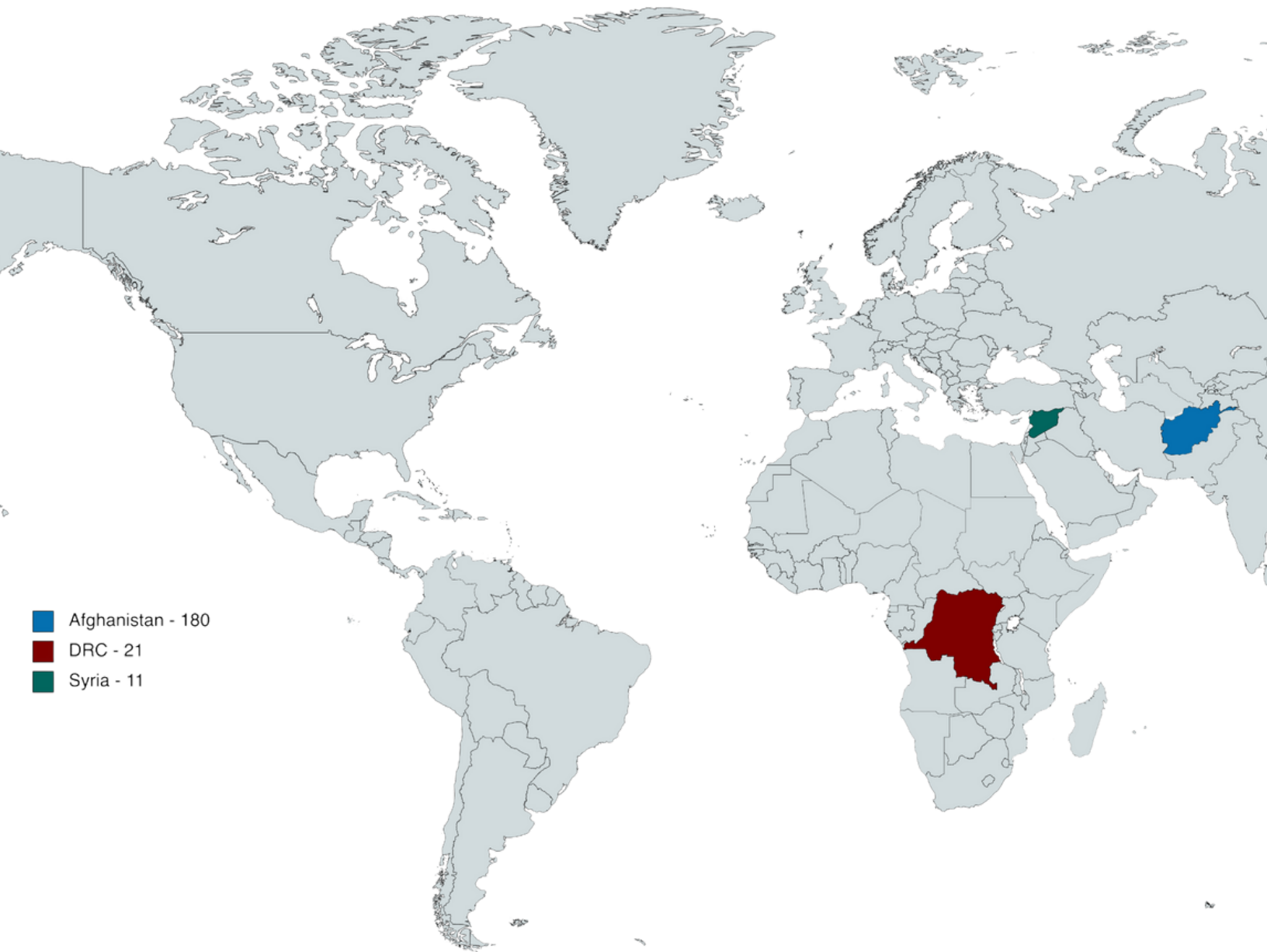
In previous years, our total donor contributions had been approximately \$45,000 annually; however, in 2021, that number skyrocketed to \$125,673. Similarly, IIA received increased foundation and grant support in response to the Afghan crisis.

Due to the generosity of our community, IIA was able to expand and grow to fill the needs of our immigrant community.

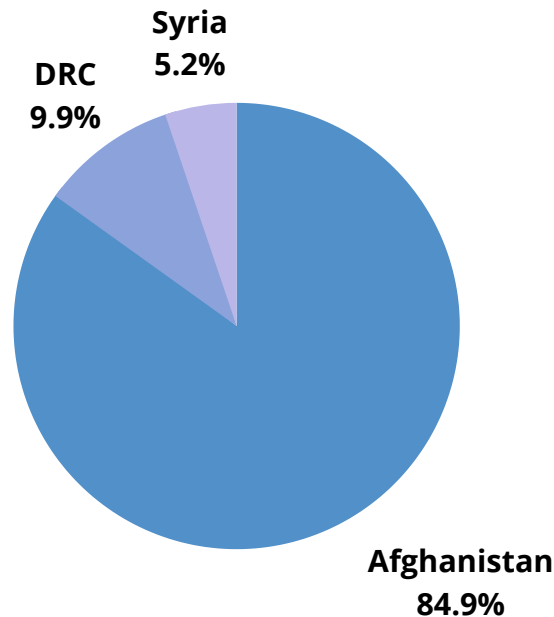
The entire IIA team truly thanks the Akron and Summit County communities for their support. We couldn't have done our work without you.



REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT



REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT



On August 30, 2021, the U.S. pulled its remaining troops from Afghanistan, leaving the country amid a humanitarian crisis. Thousands of Afghans who worked with the U.S. military were paroled to the United States. Northeast Ohio was responsible for resettling hundreds of Afghan Parolees, including 180 Afghans being resettled by IIA alone. Additionally, IIA resettled 21 individuals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 11 individuals from Syria for a total of 212 refugees and parolees resettled in Akron.

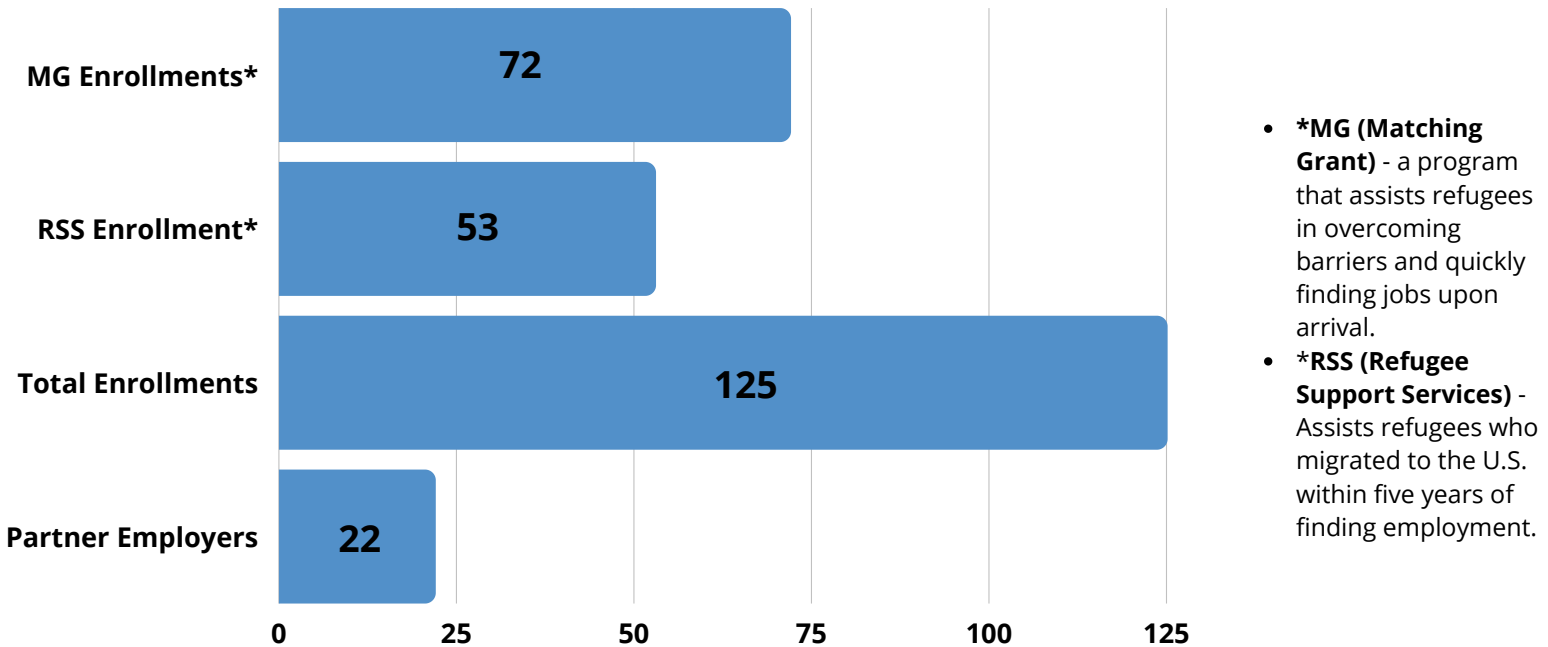
While 2021 continued to see hardship due to the ongoing pandemic, IIA provided \$50,000 in emergency assistance to vulnerable refugee and parolee families. These funds assisted in paying rent, utilities, and food needs.

IIA case managers continued to provide comprehensive integration services to newly arrived refugees while following the safest COVID-19 protocol, including mask-wearing and social distancing.

New Partnership Opens Doors to Transitional House:

In November of 2021, the International Institute of Akron partnered with Our Lady of the Elms to offer incoming refugees to the Akron area a temporary house while awaiting permanent housing. The old convent house is a tremendous help to our refugees. It is spacious, furnished, and cared for, and it provides our refugees a warm welcome to America and the Akron area. This is the first time the International Institute of Akron has ever had transitional housing for our new families. In 2021 we cared for about ten families under this partnership, with the average stay being two to six weeks. Family sizes have varied from a single child and parent to nine children and their parents and sometimes housing two families together. These families that could utilize the house could save on hotel fees ranging from around \$55.00 a night, making it easier to start transitioning into permanent housing.

Employment Services



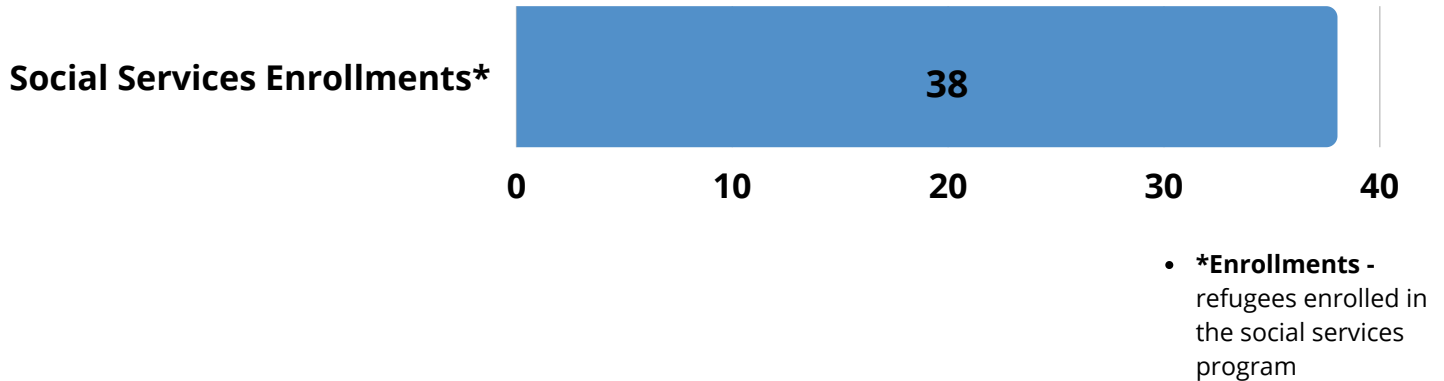
In 2021, as the United States began to ease COVID-19 regulations, many employers struggled to find individuals to fill open work positions. Businesses looked to the refugee and immigrant communities to fill these gaps in the workforce. IIA partnered with 22 employers in 2021, with Amazon and Main Street Gourmet being our top employers. A total of 125 individuals were enrolled in IIA employment services programs, with a total of 76 individuals finding employment.

IIA Benefits from Employment Services:

In the summer of 2021, IIA resettled a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) family from Afghanistan. The adult family members worked quickly with IIA staff as well as with members of the Afghan community to identify and gain employment. Not long after their arrival, the U.S. withdrew from Afghanistan. Resettlement agencies across the U.S. struggled to adapt to the influx of new clients from Afghanistan. IIA was no exception and looked for individuals within the community who possessed specific skills like language, computer skills, and empathy to join IIA's staff to assist with this new group of vulnerable individuals.

IIA staff members in the employment and resettlement departments suggested a member of that SIV family that had arrived that summer as a candidate for the position. They encouraged her to apply and advocated for her on her behalf. After rounds of interviews, she was offered the position of Community Support Specialist and accepted. She excelled in her new role and proved valuable to the organization and the Afghan community. She held this position for several months providing services for clients, assisting staff members, and providing cultural insight that proved invaluable to IIA during a hectic time in the organization's history. As IIA's capacity grew to expand and hire additional staff, she was offered and accepted a new position as a Resettlement Case Manager, a position she holds today.

Social Services



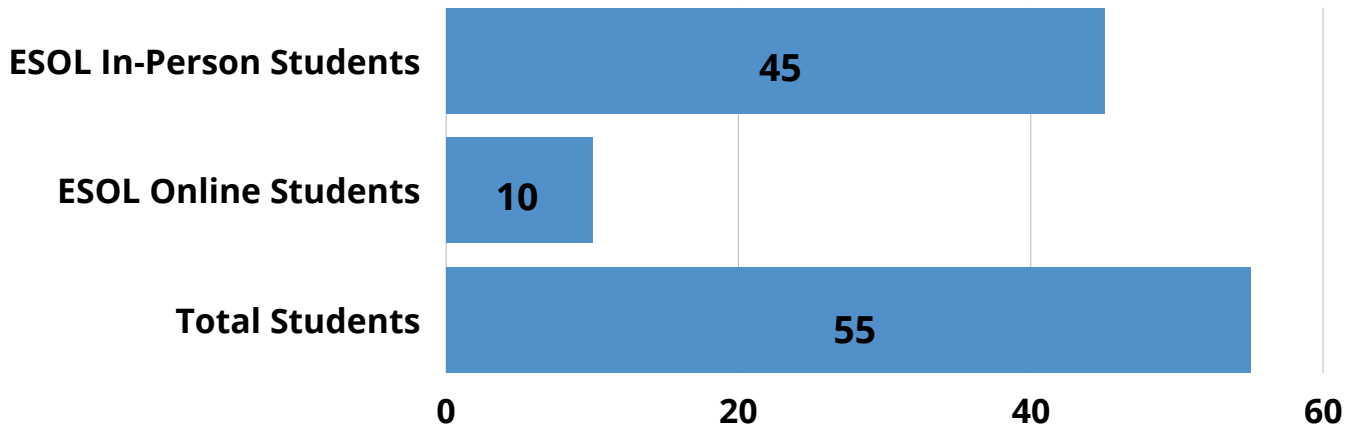
All refugees come to the United States after facing some form of trauma, whether it be from war, displacement, living in poverty, persecution, famine, or loss of community. IIA's Social Services program works with these highly vulnerable individuals to overcome barriers to reaching self-sufficiency in their new community. These individuals may experience multiple barriers to self-sufficiency, including mental or physical disabilities, elderly individuals, and LGBT+ refugees, to name a few. Caseworkers work with these individuals to identify goals and then begin working on completing those goals. For example, for a refugee whose goal is to see a psychiatrist and receive behavioral healthcare, their case manager might help set up the first appointment with a doctor, showing step-by-step the process so that the individual can eventually make appointments on their own.

Social Services Team Positively Impacts Mental Health of Refugee:

In 2021, the Social Services Program enrolled a male client from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The client had been having trouble with adjusting and issues with family wellness. The client was self-isolating and withdrew from previous activities he once enjoyed. Initially, he was unaware that he suffered from a severe mental health issue. After working with IIA's social services team, the client received mental health assessments and care. The mental health organization and the Social Services staff worked closely to assist the client in receiving counseling sessions and medication management.

The client has made many positive health gains since his enrollment. Although his progress has not been without setbacks, he maintains a much higher level of self-sufficiency and life satisfaction. The client can work without issue, has better relationships with his family, participates in his mental health treatments, and socializes with his friends and community.

Education



For refugees and immigrants, learning English as a second language significantly reduces barriers to reaching self-sufficiency in their new community. Participating in English classes allows clients to seek new employment opportunities, speak to their English-speaking neighbors, and easily navigate everyday tasks, such as using public transportation or going to the grocery store. IIA English classes offer our clients four levels of English language instruction, with the first level being designed for students with no English learning history. IIA education staff then works with students and community partners to continue their English skills beyond the beginner level.

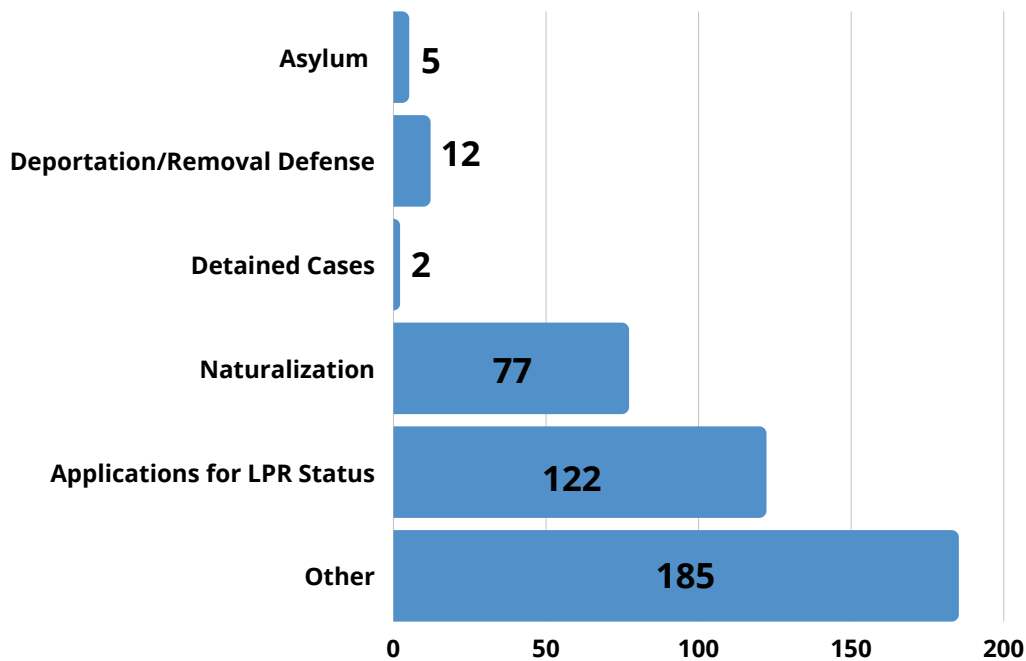
Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, IIA's education department had to adapt to CDC guidelines and safe practices to keep clients safe and healthy. In the first few months of 2021, ESOL classes were held online, with ten students participating in English classes. As COVID-19 restrictions began to ease, ESOL classes could move back into the classroom for in-person instruction, with 45 students taking advantage of in-person English classes during the remainder of 2021.

IIA Educator Restores Confidence in ESOL Student:

In 2021, IIA education staff noticed an ESOL student hadn't shown interest in learning English over the course of a few weeks. The staff member asked the student if she was ill, and she reluctantly responded that she was not making English language progress due to being in her late 50s. The student mentioned that she wanted to return to her home country of Nepal, where she could speak her native language. The education staff member told her that no student of his has left an IIA ESOL class without making any progress and that he would not let her become the exception to this.

After a couple of months of hard work, the student was seen speaking English to a classmate, stating that "learning is possible my friend, now I started understanding little English." Later, the student told IIA staff that she was beginning to communicate with her neighbors in English and had a much more positive attitude towards learning. The student quickly became a role model for her classmates and had one of the highest attendance records of any student. She now shares her success story with other English language learners and newly arrived refugees to show that learning English is essential and possible for anyone in the community.

Legal Services



After U.S. troops left Afghanistan in August of 2021, IIA's legal team assisted approximately 55 Afghan clients to help about 325 family members evacuate Afghanistan and seek safety in another country.

Additionally, the legal team provided services to refugees, immigrants, and asylees in various cases, such as naturalization, application for LPR status, and deportation/removal defenses, for a total of 403 cases in 2021.

Legal Services Victory in Asylum Case:

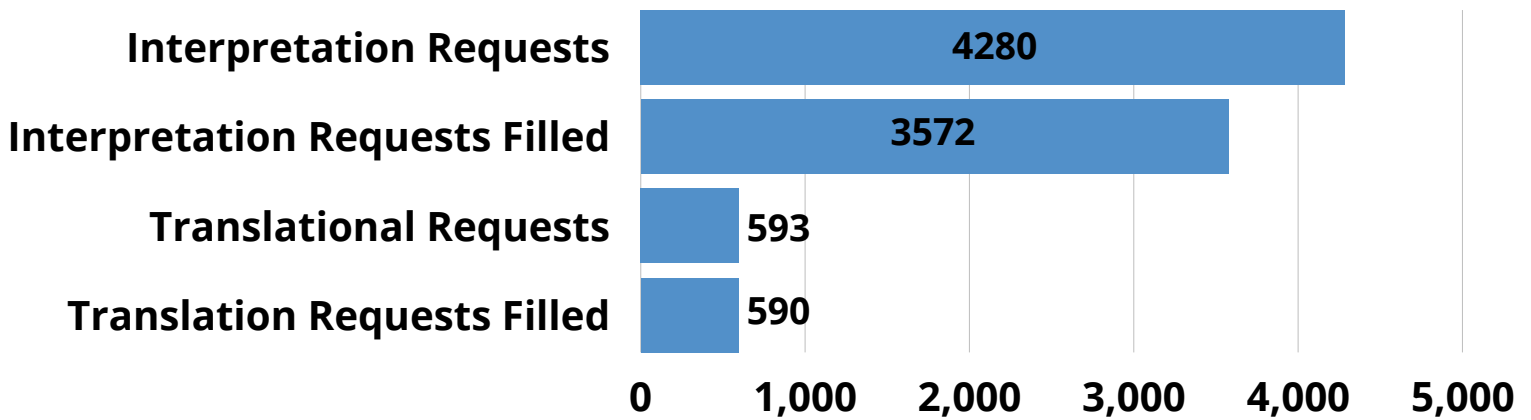
In 2019, a client came to IIA's Legal Department seeking representation for court proceedings. The client had formerly worked for the Honduran military in his home country of Honduras. Years after leaving the military, a commanding officer contacted the client to recruit him for a secret military operation. The client did not support this operation's mission and declined, leading to his torture by the Honduran military. He eventually fled to the United States and was detained at the border.

The attorney who helped the client get released from detention referred him to IIA legal services once he moved to Ohio. Upon arriving in Ohio, IIA's legal team secured employment authorization for him as he awaited his hearing.

In 2021, the IIA legal team helped the client win his asylum case, providing stability for his immigration status and a pathway toward U.S. citizenship. Representation in removal proceedings, like IIA provided to the client, is critical for immigrants. Asylum claims can be both factually and legally complex, making them difficult to establish for immigrants without legal representation. One study estimates that immigrants with legal representation are more than twice as likely as those without legal representation of prevailing in their asylum claims. Currently, less than half of all immigrants in removal proceedings are represented by legal counsel.

Since the client won his asylum claim, he no longer has to fear being deported to Honduras, where the client would face persecution. The IIA Legal Department continues to work with the client by connecting him to support services in Virginia, where he now resides with his family, to ensure he has the tools he needs to continue succeeding in life.

Interpretation and Translation Services



In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. This includes discrimination based on language and requires all federally funded programs to provide interpretation for people who do not speak English.

IIA works to uphold Title VI of the Civil Rights Act by providing trained interpreters and translators to government entities, courts, law enforcement, hospitals, health care, social service providers, and businesses in the area. We offer a variety of languages that include those highly spoken in the Akron immigrant community, such as Nepali, Mon, Dari, Pashto, Arabic, Swahili, and French.

Our Interpretation and Translation departments dramatically close barriers between services and clients and allow for a more equitable integration experience. In 2021, our Interpretation and Translation team received 4,280 interpretation requests and 593 translation requests from the community.

Swahili Interpreter Breaks Down Barriers for Client Success:

In 2021, IIA's social services department had a male Congolese client who needed to attend court-mandated mental health counseling due to behavioral issues and alcohol abuse. He was required to participate in 12 sessions with the Akron Psychological Association to get the counseling he needed. He didn't speak English, so he needed an interpreter for each session. Fortunately, via IIA's interpretation department, his case manager ensured that he had a Swahili interpreter for each session and kept it to one out of two of the same interpreters to ensure consistency throughout the sessions. After completing all 12 sessions, the client demonstrated a notable behavioral improvement, giving up drinking and retaining a job. Without the consistent assistance of a Swahili interpreter, the counseling and subsequent modifications would not have been possible.

Volunteer Contributions

16 volunteers and interns
contributed **2158** hours of
service in 2021.

IIA's work in the refugee and immigrant community would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of our volunteers and interns. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and budget cuts brought on by the Trump administration, refugee resettlement agencies around the country suffered, and many were even forced to close. At IIA, our doors stayed open to refugees and immigrants forced to flee their homes and find safety in Akron. A part of why our work could continue was due to the selflessness and hard work of our volunteers and interns; whether they worked in our donations room, assisted our legal team with casework, or called landlords to find housing for newly arrived refugees, we couldn't have done it without them. In all, a team of 16 volunteers and interns provided over 2150 hours of work in support of our mission in 2021.

Community Bands Together for Afghan Support:

In the Fall of 2021, while still working under strict COVID-19 restrictions, IIA was faced with the challenge of rapidly increasing our capacity to serve as a result of the fall of the government of Afghanistan. With the sudden and unexpected arrival of hundreds of Afghan evacuees over a short period, we had to mobilize quickly to meet the needs of those we serve.

During this time, we relied heavily on our team of dedicated volunteers. Immediately after the withdrawal from Afghanistan, we received a tremendous outpouring of support from our community. We began getting truckloads of donated items delivered to our office daily, in addition to community partners who held donation drives. Collecting, tracking, and organizing all of these donations would not have been possible without the work put in by our volunteers. Our volunteer team spent countless hours ensuring all donations were tracked and sorted while coordinating with our housing team to furnish homes and quickly and efficiently distribute items to those in need.

Social Media



@InternationalInstituteofAkron

3,500 page likes

3,800 followers



@ii_akron

730 followers



@iiakron

1,092 followers

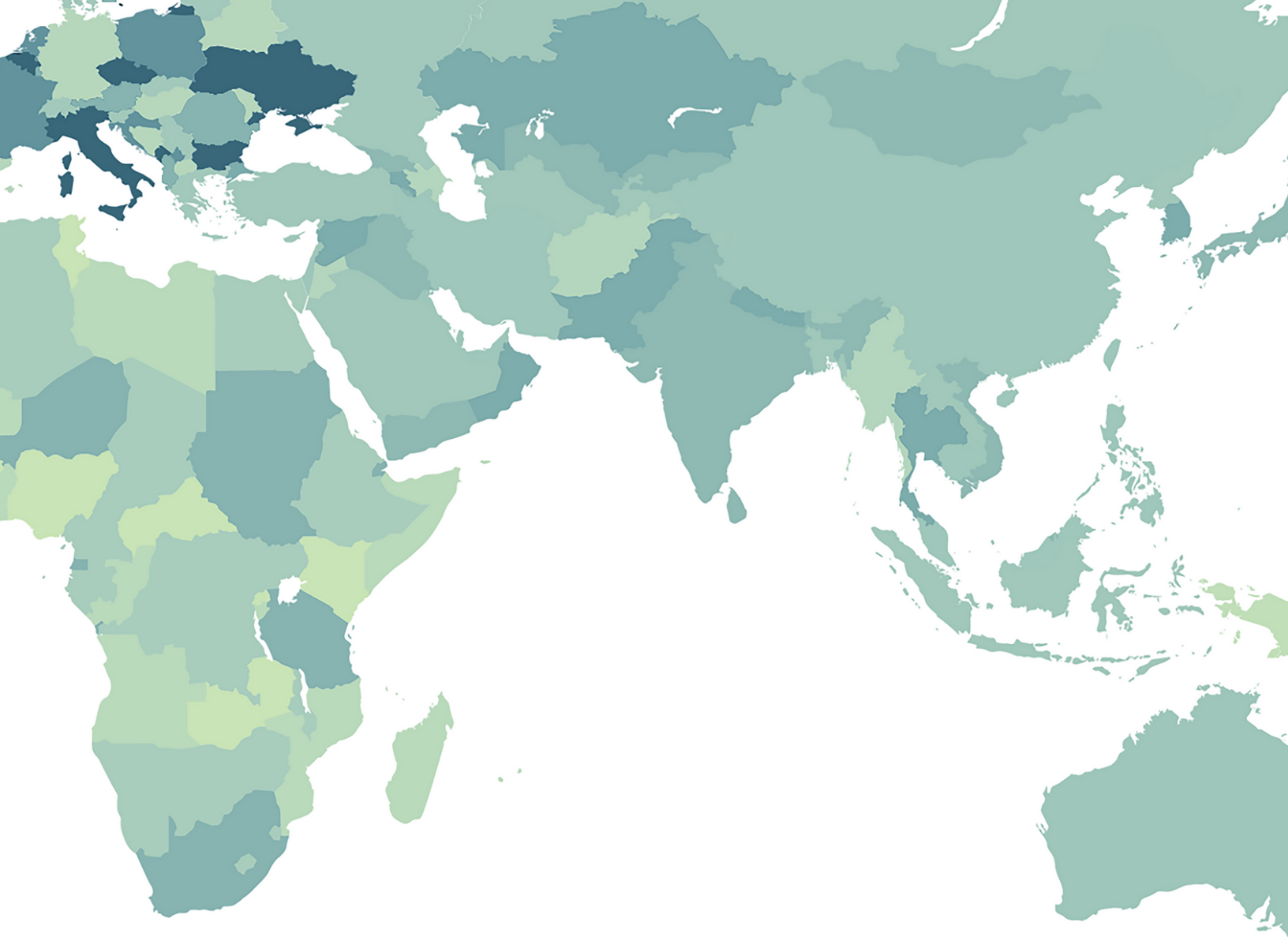
Foundation Support

Solomon Foundation



The Mary S. and David C.
CORBIN FOUNDATION





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