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Immigration and Human Rights Law Organization Expands Afghan Artist Resettlement Program to Europe

Artistic Freedom Initiative's Afghan Artists Protection Program establishes a European arm to provide immigration services for Afghan refugees in Germany

NEW YORK — [Artistic Freedom Initiative](#) (AFI) announced today the expansion of its [Afghan Artists Protection Project](#) (AAPP), which will now support artist relocation in Europe. AAPP Europe will begin operations in Germany to facilitate the legal relocation and resettlement of artists and their families by providing pro bono immigration representation, relocation assistance, temporary housing, resettlement funds, employment and fellowship opportunities and ongoing support post-relocation.

Launched in 2021 with funding from the [Mellon Foundation](#) and the SDK Foundation for Human Dignity, AAPP is a holistic resettlement initiative developed in response to the growing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan following the United States' withdrawal in August 2021. The project aims to safely resettle Afghan artists and their families, who are increasingly threatened under Taliban rule, and allow them to preserve their livelihoods as artists in the United States and now, Europe.

“From the beginning of our involvement on Afghan artist resettlement, it became clear that several key countries in Europe, including Germany, offered distinct advantages for displaced artists, including expedited evacuation from Afghanistan, housing assistance, and university-based fellowships. The expansion of AAPP into Europe will augment our efforts to resettle Afghan artists in the environment best-suited to both their social reintegration and professional development,” said [Sanjay Sethi](#), **co-executive director of AFI**.

Yama Rahimi will serve as AAPP Europe's first resettlement coordinator, assisting artists with German visa applications and providing holistic resettlement support. Berlin-based attorney Michael Mai will coordinate advocacy before the German government on securing artists entry into Germany. Rahimi moved to Germany from Afghanistan in 2015 to study art at the Offenbach University of Art and Design. As the refugee crisis in Afghanistan surged, he partnered with Mr. Mai to provide pro bono

resettlement services for artists attempting to flee the country. Since joining AFI on March 15, 2022, Rahimi and Mai have assisted 53 Afghans in relocating and settling in Germany.

While the Afghan Artists Protection Project was initially developed to safely resettle 18 Afghan artists and their families to the US, the program was expanded to support the overwhelming need for resettlement assistance from at-risk artists. AFI has received over 2,500 individual requests for legal assistance from Afghan artists since the launch of the project, many of which have been subjected to torture, beatings, door-to-door searches, destruction of art and musical instruments, and physical injuries to prevent them from creative activity.

“My work as an artist put me and my family at risk in Afghanistan, forcing me to leave my country and my family behind in 2015,” said **Yama Rahimi, resettlement coordinator of AAPP Europe**. “When I first got to Germany, I struggled with living as a refugee in a new country with a different culture and language. It was through the help and support of individuals here that I was able to find my way. When the Taliban took over in August, I knew I had to do whatever I could to help other artists relocate safely. What I have been doing since last August is not a miracle. I am just giving my time to the people that need much more support than me, especially young student artists. They are like candles that we need to keep burning if we believe in the brightness of the Afghan nation in the future.”

Since its founding in 2017, the Artistic Freedom Initiative has worked on more than 700 cases of at-risk, forcibly displaced artists and has provided nearly \$3 million in pro bono legal services and resettlement assistance. The artists in AFI’s network come from over 50 countries and work across more than 30 creative disciplines, from poets to graphic designers.

“Our Resettlement Assistance program is a foundational element of what we do at Artistic Freedom Initiative,” said **Ashley Tucker, co-executive director of AFI**. “Beyond providing the legal assistance necessary to safely relocate artists, our work continues to ensure these individuals have access to communities, housing, and opportunities to rebuild their professional careers as they restabilize in a brand new city, country, or continent.”

Led by immigration and human rights attorneys, the organization anchors its work to the shared commitment of protecting and celebrating cultural diversity, human dignity and freedom of artistic expression. Beyond AFI’s work to provide holistic relocation and resettlement opportunities for artists under threat, it is also focused on the advancement

of creative cultural exchange and the improvement of conditions for artists in their home countries.

If you are interested in speaking further with Sanjay Sethi or Yama Rahimi about the Afghan Artists Protection Project, or AFI's ongoing work to protect artistic freedom globally, please contact **Sofia Monterroso** at sofia@artisticfreedominitiative.org.

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About Artistic Freedom Initiative: Artistic Freedom Initiative (AFI) is dedicated to safeguarding the right to artistic freedom that facilitates pro bono immigration representation and resettlement assistance for international artists at risk. [Learn more here.](#)