



**Report to Congress on the  
Process by which Applications for Special Immigrant Visas under  
Special Immigrant Status for Certain Iraqis Are Processed  
Section 1218 (g) of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2014  
(P.L.113-66)**

The Department of State (State), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and other U.S. government departments and agencies involved in the Iraqi Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program are committed to helping the Iraqi men and women who have taken significant risks to support our military and civilian personnel. The U.S. government has devoted substantial resources to reducing the amount of time required to complete the Iraqi SIV process, authorized under section 1244 of the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2008, as amended, while still ensuring thorough screening for national security concerns, and we continue to strive for improvements.

**How many Iraqi SIVs have been issued in the fourth quarter (Q4) of Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 (July 1, 2023 to September 30, 2023)?**

Iraqi Principal Applicants Issued in Q4	Iraqi Derivative Applicants Issued in Q4	Total Iraqi SIVs Issued in Q4 FY 2023 (July 1, 2023, through September 30, 2023)	Total Iraqi Numbers Used <sup>1</sup>	Remaining SIVs for Iraqi Principal Applicants
20	58	78	2,370	130

**What efficiency improvements have been made to Iraqi SIV processing?**

U.S. Embassy Baghdad continues to work toward restoring full capacity for consular services, following a three-year suspension that resulted from a December 2019 attack on the embassy compound. An entryway damaged during the attack was re-opened in October 2022, and the consular section is now offering all services, including SIV interviews. Staffing and security constraints, however, still limit the section's capacity. Despite these constraints, the Embassy prioritizes SIVs and approves all requests to transfer SIV cases for Iraqi applicants that had been assigned to other posts back to Baghdad.

**What is the average U.S. government processing time for Iraqi SIVs and how many cases are processed in that time?**

All steps in the Iraqi SIV application process are outlined below and include the current average processing time for all involved U.S. government entities. This statistic captures total U.S. government processing time in calendar days, beginning when the applicant first expresses interest in the program to State's National Visa Center (NVC) and ending with the date of visa issuance at a U.S. embassy or consulate. It does not capture those steps in the SIV process that are outside of U.S. government control and that

<sup>1</sup> Total number of visas issued to SIV principal applicants overseas combined with SIV numbers used through domestic adjustments of status since the current allotment of permanent numbers became available on January 1, 2014.

depend solely on the applicant's initiative. However, even within each step below that is identified as under U.S. government control, there may be significant time spent waiting on applicant or third-party action not attributable to the U.S. government entities involved. Therefore, the average processing time likely overestimates the total processing time attributable to the U.S. government entities involved.

<b>SIV Processing Steps<sup>2,3</sup></b>				
<b>Stage</b>	<b>Step</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Average processing times in calendar days</b>	<b>Number of Cases Processed</b>
Chief of Mission (COM) application process	1	Applicant submits COM application package to State's NVC. (The deadline was September 30, 2014.)	Applicant-controlled	N/A
	2	NVC reviews documents for completeness.	1	58 <sup>4</sup>
	3	NVC sends complete application package to U.S. Embassy Baghdad.	N/A	N/A <sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Processing steps are for SIVs authorized under section 1244 of the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2008, as amended. This applies to Iraqi nationals in the SQ classification.

<sup>3</sup> Previous versions of this report listed 14 steps. During the first quarter of FY 2022, Step 5 "U.S. Embassy Baghdad advises NVC if COM application is approved. NVC immediately sends approval letter to applicant. (If any documents reveal that the applicant does not qualify for the program, the COM application is denied.)" was fully automated and no longer requires manual processing. As such, the Department will no longer include information on this step in its reporting.

<sup>4</sup>This number reflects the number of case reviews conducted by the NVC within the quarter. This number does not include any new cases or appeals. This number includes the number of cases reviewed for people trying to apply, seeking status on old denied cases, seeking general assistance, or misdirected inquiries. This number may be larger than the total number of cases pending at the NVC because an individual case might be reviewed multiple times in a quarter.

<sup>5</sup> During this quarter, there were no cases completed at this stage.

COM application process	4	U.S. Embassy Baghdad reviews COM application and the COM or COM Designee decides to approve or deny.	N/A	N/A <sup>6</sup>
Form I-360 adjudication process	5	Applicant self-petitions to DHS U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) using Form I-360.	Applicant-controlled	N/A
	6	USCIS adjudicates petition and sends to NVC if approved. <sup>7</sup>	3	12
Visa Interview Process, including pre- and post-interview <sup>8</sup>	7	NVC sends instruction packet to applicant requesting standard immigrant visa documentation, including DS-260 immigrant visa application.	5	8
	8	Applicant submits required documentation to NVC.	Applicant-controlled	N/A

<sup>6</sup> The deadline for Iraqi principal applicants to submit new applications for chief of mission approval was September 30, 2014. The Baghdad COM did not receive any new cases or appeals in the current quarter.

<sup>7</sup> For I-360 petitions filed with USCIS between July 1, 2023, and September 30, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> The majority of applicants receive SIV status by going through the process explained in this chart. Applicants who obtain SIV status in the United States apply for adjustment of status from USCIS.

Visa Interview Process, including pre- and post-interview	9	NVC reviews documents for completeness, corresponding with applicant when additional documentation is needed.	7	1,529 <sup>9</sup>
	10	When the visa application is complete, NVC schedules applicant for next available interview at a U.S. Embassy.	N/A	0
	11	Applicant is interviewed and biometrics are collected by consular officer on the scheduled appointment date. Administrative processing is initiated following the interview. <sup>10</sup>	N/A	30
	12	The applicant's case undergoes administrative processing.	412	52

<sup>9</sup> As in Step 2, this number reflects the number of case reviews conducted by the NVC. The NVC counts a review each time a SIV applicant submits additional documents to complete their case. This number may be larger than the total number of cases pending at the NVC because an individual case might be reviewed multiple times per quarter.

<sup>10</sup> Administrative processing may include a variety of security, fraud, or criminal background checks that are required before the visa may be issued.

Visa issuance to eligible applicants	13	Upon completion of administrative processing, the applicant is instructed to obtain a medical exam. Once the medical exam is completed, the visa is issued if the applicant is eligible. In some cases, the passport will have expired and requires renewal by the applicant.	Applicant-controlled	N/A
		<b>Total U.S. government processing time in calendar days<sup>11</sup></b>	<b>428</b>	<b>N/A</b>

### Why are applications pending longer than nine months?

Certain applications may be pending longer than nine months due to administrative processing (Step 12). Administrative processing often involves rigorous background checks, which are essential to the integrity of the SIV program and U.S. national security. The current average processing time reflects numerous complicated long-pending cases were resolved: One case each from 2015, 2016, and 2018; three cases from 2020; five cases from 2021; and twelve cases from 2022; and six cases from first quarter of 2023 were closed during the reporting period, while 23 cases closed with an average processing time of 27 days. Resolving long-standing cases is essential; however, it leads to an increased average when calculating processing times.

<sup>11</sup> The statistics in this chart were formerly reported in business days in reports published April 2014 - April 2016. U.S. government processing times do not factor in applicant-controlled steps. Overall processing times are greater than U.S. government processing times.

### How many SIV applications are pending as of September 30, 2023?

Step 1 – There were no new COM applications submitted by Iraqi principal applicants pending at NVC during this period. The deadline for Iraqis to apply for COM approval was September 30, 2014.

Step 6 – 6 Iraqi principal applicants had a Form I-360 pending with USCIS.

Step 10 – There is 1 principal applicant and 4 derivative family members pending scheduling for visa interviews.

Step 12 – Applications for 51 principal applicants and 32 family members were undergoing administrative processing.

### How many SIV applicants were interviewed in Q4 of FY 2023?

The deadline to apply for COM approval was September 30, 2014. There were 24 SIV applicants who, after COM approval, were scheduled for an interview in the fourth quarter of FY 2023.

The following shows the number of Iraqi applicants who executed an application for an SIV at a visa interview in the fourth quarter of FY 2023 under section 1244 of the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2008, as amended, after receiving COM approval:

Month	Principal Applicants	Derivative Family Members	Total
July	11	42	53
August	8	20	28
September	11	23	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>115</b>

## **How many denials were there in the Q4 of FY 23?**

No principal applicants were deemed unqualified to receive COM approval or had their approval revoked during the fourth quarter of FY 2023. Applicants whose COM applications are denied or revoked can submit one appeal within 120 days of receiving the denial or revocation letter.

USCIS denied 14 principal applicants' Form I-360 during FY 2023 Q4.

## **What are the reasons for a COM denial?**

COM application denial generally occurs for one or more of the following:

- Failure to establish employment by or on behalf of the U.S. government. Applications are denied for this reason if the applicant fails to establish qualifying employment. For information on qualifying employment, see the Department of State website at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/special-immg-visas-iraqis-employed-us-gov.html>.
- Failure to establish one year employment by or on behalf of the U.S. government between March 20, 2003, and September 30, 2013.
- Failure to establish providing faithful and valuable service to the U.S. government. Applications denied for this reason generally have involved cases lacking requisite positive recommendation or evaluation. In some instances where faithful and valuable service was not confirmed, employment by or on behalf of the U.S. government had been terminated for cause.
- Derogatory information that is incompatible with the requirements of the SIV program. This reason generally relates to information indicating that the applicant engaged in an unlawful, unethical, criminal, or terrorism-related activity.