

National Visa Center Update for Congressional Offices



U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs

A Message from the Director

July 2015

In response to feedback from Congressional offices, the NVC is pleased to present the inaugural edition of our Congressional newsletter. On a regular basis, the NVC will gather the latest news, procedural changes, and helpful tips into one newsletter sent via e-mail to Congressional offices in Washington, DC and local districts.

I hope you find this information useful in your daily work supporting constituents. I'd also like to invite you to visit us in Portsmouth, NH. Earlier this year we hosted two groups of district staff members for a tour, presentation, and question-and-answer session. The feedback from these visits is immensely helpful to our continuing efforts to improve our services. I was also pleased to offer "office hours" on the Hill last month – thank you to all who attended – and I am committed to expanding those hours on my next visit to Washington, DC.

If you would like to be added to our mailing list for this newsletter, please send an e-mail to NVCCongressional@state.gov.

Thank you and we hope to hear from you soon!
Phillip T. Slattery
Director, National Visa Center

Change to Interview Location for Applicants from Sudan, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Reunion

We're pleased to announce that the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum, Sudan began processing Immigrant Visas (IV) this month. Previously applicants had been interviewed in Cairo but are now automatically being scheduled for an interview in Khartoum.

Also effective this month, the U.S. Consulate General in Johannesburg, South Africa is the immigrant visa processing location for residents of Mauritius, Seychelles, and Reunion, who were previously interviewed in Nairobi.

The NVC is notifying affected applicants of these changes. Information on the Embassy in Khartoum is online at <http://sudan.usembassy.gov/>. You can learn more about the consulate in Johannesburg at http://southafrica.usembassy.gov/consulate_johannesburg.html.



Current Processing Times (7/27)

- 14 days to process incoming petitions upon receipt of files from USCIS
- 23 days to review civil and financial documents mailed by applicants
- NVC receives 14,000 to 16,000 petitions weekly from USCIS

Kathmandu Applicants Now Submit Documents Via E-mail

Due to the recent earthquakes in Nepal, the NVC is converting all Nepalese immigrant visa cases to e-mail processing. This means that any future documents required by the NVC must be scanned and emailed as an attachment to nvcelectronic@state.gov.

Documents submitted by mail will be returned to sender without review. Your constituents can find information on how to submit documents to the NVC by email at <http://nvc.state.gov/submit>.

IV Applications Now Accessible Online via <http://CEAC.state.gov>

Immigrant visa applications on the Department of State's Consular Electronic Application Center (CEAC) are now accessible to the majority of applicants who need to submit Form DS-261 "Choice of Address and Agent" and Form DS-260 "Immigrant Visa Application" online, and pay their visa fees online. Thank you for your patience over the past few weeks as the Department worked to resolve recent technical problems with our consular systems.

While most applicants should now be able to access the required forms on CEAC, those who are still having difficulty should wait at least 24 hours before trying again. Your constituents can also follow the instructions at <http://nvc.state.gov/solutions>, which we will continue to update until our systems issues are completely resolved.

"Modernized Immigrant Visa" Pilot Program Expands

In May, five embassies/consulates joined Montreal in the pilot program of the Modernized Immigrant Visa (MIV) online system: Buenos Aires, Frankfurt, Hong Kong, Rio de Janeiro, and Sydney. The MIV system is a thorough renovation of the systems and procedures we use to process immigrant visas, replacing the current paper-based processing with digital technology. Our aim is to eliminate the IV packet and boxes of paper that get shipped all over the world so we can focus more on our customers.



One of the NVC's two petition storage rooms in Portsmouth, NH.

TIPS FOR FASTER SERVICE

- E-mail us at NVCCongressional@state.gov
- Use the NVC case number or USCIS receipt number as the subject line
- Please refer to one case per e-mail
- Include in the body of the e-mail the name and date of birth of the beneficiary (visa applicant)
- Attach a privacy waiver

The Bureau of Consular Affairs has developed a suite of applications that will manage electronic immigrant visa records and the communications passing between the NVC, overseas visa-issuing posts, Department of Homeland Security offices, and others. By digitizing the paper process, we anticipate a significant reduction in the time it takes to process an immigrant visa.

Towards that end, we are working to improve our customer interface through our initial pilot program, which will help us

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refine the system before we move to the larger challenges of some of our busier IV posts. We believe applicants will see tangible improvements as we move away from paper files and step towards a faster, more secure, and modern way to serve the public.

Recent Procedural Changes to Improve NVC's Processing Time

In recent months the NVC has made several changes to our procedures so we can more quickly and efficiently review cases. Here are some of the most impactful changes:

- As of November 2014, the NVC no longer requires that applicants send us original civil documents. Instead, applicants should send photocopies or scans of their documents to the NVC for review and bring their original civil documents to the visa interview for final verification by a consular officer.
- The NVC now reviews all documents and forms — including the DS-260 “Immigrant Visa Application” — simultaneously. This allows us to greatly reduce the number of "checklist" letters requesting further information. As of September 2014, the NVC sends only one instructional letter when processing begins; applicants are then responsible for moving themselves along through the processing steps.
- We installed a new phone system and increased the number of available phone lines by 25 percent on our public inquiry line, allowing us to double the number of telephone inquiry responses within weeks.

NVC Statistics: FY2014

- Received 709,000+ petitions from USCIS
- Updated 99,000 newly current Family-Based petitions
- 450,000 cases processed and sent to embassies
- 2.6 million cases at NVC
- Received 1.4 million pieces of incoming mail
- Sent 3 million pieces of outgoing mail
- Responded to 1,700,000 written inquiries
- Responded to 1,600,000 public calls
- Responded to 98,000 Congressional inquiries

Scheduling or Transferring Yemeni Applicants

U.S. Embassy Cairo is the designated IV processing post for petition-based cases and U.S. Embassy Algiers for Diversity Visa cases. These posts were chosen because they are best equipped to accommodate the extra workload. The NVC is scheduling interviews in Cairo in date order to ensure fairness – in other words, a case that was found documentarily qualified in July 2014 will receive an interview before a case that qualified in April 2015.

Currently the Egyptian government requires Yemenis ages 18-60 to obtain Egyptian visas prior to arrival in Egypt. Applicants scheduled in Cairo who are unable to receive an Egyptian visa can request their case be transferred to another U.S. Embassy by e-mailing a detailed request including their case number to ivyemen@state.gov. Please note that an applicant generally must be present in a country for a transfer request to be considered.

Applicants who are *physically present* in Djibouti can request their case be transferred there, but should know that they will likely be in Djibouti for several months to allow their case to transfer and process. More information for Yemeni immigrant visa applicants is available on http://yemen.usembassy.gov/immigrant_visas.html.

Tips for Your Constituents

Here are some good rules of thumb to share with your constituents:

- Please allow six to eight weeks after receipt of an [I-797 Notice of Action](#) from USCIS before contacting the NVC about a case to ensure USCIS has had enough time to mail the petition and NVC has entered it into our database.
- Applicants should **NOT** send original documents to the NVC. However, they **must** bring these originals to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate for their visa interview.
- Please mail all of your financial and supporting documents to the NVC in **one** envelope, and include the NVC-provided document cover sheet.
- Don't forget to review the Frequently Asked Questions on NVC's website at <http://NVC.state.gov>.
- When a case is ready to start processing at the NVC, we will send applicants a letter with instructions directing them to complete six steps. The NVC will **not** contact applicants after each step to tell them to move to the next step; it is their responsibility to review the instructions online and complete all six steps independently.

Reminder about Non-Immigrant Visa Inquiries

The NVC has received a number of inquiries about non-immigrant visa (NIV) cases that we are unable to respond to because it is not clear that the applicant has given permission for us to provide information to the Congressional office. NIV cases differ from immigrant visa cases because your constituent is not a part of the case and therefore cannot request case details.

Section 222(f) of the Immigration and Nationality Act restricts the release of information from visa records. Therefore, if seeking information about an NIV case, please send the NVC a Privacy Act Waiver form or letter signed by the applicant, or an attached e-mail from an address linked to the visa applicant's record and that specifically requests help from the Congressional office.

If you are simply forwarding us a letter of support for an application, we can send that to the U.S. Embassy or consulate overseas without a Privacy Act Waiver form.

CONTACT US

Congressional Inquiries Team

 603-334-0828

 NVCCongressional@state.gov

The above contact information is for Congressional use only. Please do not share this information with the public.

Website

<http://nvc.state.gov>

GENERAL PUBLIC INQUIRIES

 603-334-0700

Monday through Friday
7:00 am – midnight EDT

 E-mail via the public inquiry form on <http://nvc.state.gov>

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