

**Joint Department of State/Department of Homeland Security Report:  
Status of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program**

The Department of State (State), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and other U.S. government departments and agencies involved in the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program are committed to helping the men and women who have taken significant risks to support our military and civilian personnel. Congress, under section 602(b) of the *Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009*, as amended, requires this quarterly report to review statistical data on nationals of Afghanistan who have applied for status as special immigrants.

**How many Afghan SIVs have been issued in the Second Quarter of FY 2021 (January 1, 2021 to March 31, 2021)?**

Afghan Principal Applicants Issued	Afghan Derivative Applicants Issued	Total Afghan SIVs Issued in FY 2021 (through March 31, 2021)	Total Afghan Numbers Used <sup>1</sup>	Remaining SIVs for Afghan applicants
137	652	2,035	15,641	10,859

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

Chief of Mission (COM) staff acquired five additional temporary duty (TDY) personnel this reporting period. They are undergoing COM training to support processing operations. Additional recruitment will generate additional TDY and contractor support. These hires are in the interview and onboarding process.

COM staff is working with the U.S. Digital Service (USDS) to better use technology to improve the efficiency and workflow of the COM-approval process. U.S. Embassy Kabul reopened in-person immigrant visa services in February of 2021 following the suspension of visa services due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Beginning in February of 2021, U.S. Embassy Kabul began interviewing SIV applicants whose appointments had been cancelled in March and April of 2020 due to the suspension of visa interviews.

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

All steps in the Afghan 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.<sup>2</sup> It does not capture those steps in the SIV process that depend solely on the applicant’s initiative and are outside the control of the U.S. government.

<sup>1</sup> Number of visas issued since permanent numbers became available on November 25, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> The Department of State’s National Visa Center (NVC) should not be confused with the National Vetting Center, also known as NVC, established under the National Security Presidential Memorandum 9.

<b>Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Processing Steps<sup>3</sup></b>				
<b>Stage</b>	<b>Step</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Average processing time in calendar days for Q2</b>	<b># of Cases Processed in Q2</b>
Chief of Mission (COM) application process	1	Applicant submits COM application package to State's NVC. <sup>4</sup>	Applicant-controlled	N/A
	2	NVC reviews documents for completeness.	19	11,569 <sup>5</sup>
	3	NVC sends completed application package to the COM Committee at the U.S. Embassy Kabul.	1	1,116
	4	The COM Committee reviews the application and makes a decision to approve or deny.	495 <sup>6</sup>	2,032
	5	The COM Committee advises NVC if the application is approved. If approved, NVC immediately sends approval letter to applicant. (If any documents reveal	5	2,229

<sup>3</sup> Processing steps are for SIVs authorized under section 602(b) of the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, as amended. This applies to Afghan nationals in the SQ classification.

<sup>4</sup> At this stage, the applicant has reached out to NVC in order to express interest in the program and provide the documents necessary to complete their application.

<sup>5</sup> This number reflects the number of case reviews conducted by the NVC within the quarter. The NVC counts a review each time an 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 in a single quarter.

<sup>6</sup> Totals include data for SIV applicants who completed Chief of Mission Committee review between January 1, 2021 and March 31, 2021.

		that applicant does not qualify for the program, the COM application is denied.)		
Form I-360 adjudication process	6	Applicant self-petitions to DHS U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) using form I-360.	Applicant-controlled	N/A
	7	USCIS adjudicates petition and sends to NVC if approved. <sup>7</sup>	34	1,723
Visa interview process, including pre- and post-interview <sup>8</sup>	8	NVC sends instruction packet to applicant requesting standard immigrant visa documentation, including DS-260 immigrant visa application.	10	1,655
	9	Applicant submits required documentation to NVC.	Applicant-controlled	N/A
	10	NVC reviews documents for completeness, corresponding with applicant when additional documentation is needed.	10	629 <sup>9</sup>
	11	When the immigrant visa application is complete, NVC schedules applicant	N/A	0

<sup>7</sup> For I-360 petitions filed with USCIS between January 1, 2021 and March 31, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> The majority of applicants receive special immigrant status by going through the process explained in this chart. Applicants who obtain special immigrant status in the United States apply for [adjustment of status](#) from USCIS.

<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 an 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 in a single quarter.

		for next available interview at the U.S. embassy's consular section.		
	12	Applicant is interviewed by consular officer on the scheduled appointment date. Administrative processing is initiated following the interview. <sup>10</sup>	N/A	129 <sup>11</sup>
	13	The applicant's case undergoes administrative processing. <sup>12</sup>	129	125
Visa issuance to eligible applicants	14	Upon completion of administrative processing, applicant is instructed to obtain a medical exam. The visa is issued if 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>13</sup></b>	<b>703</b>	<b>N/A</b>

<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.

<sup>11</sup> Line 12 reflects the number of cases interviewed at the U.S. Embassy Kabul.

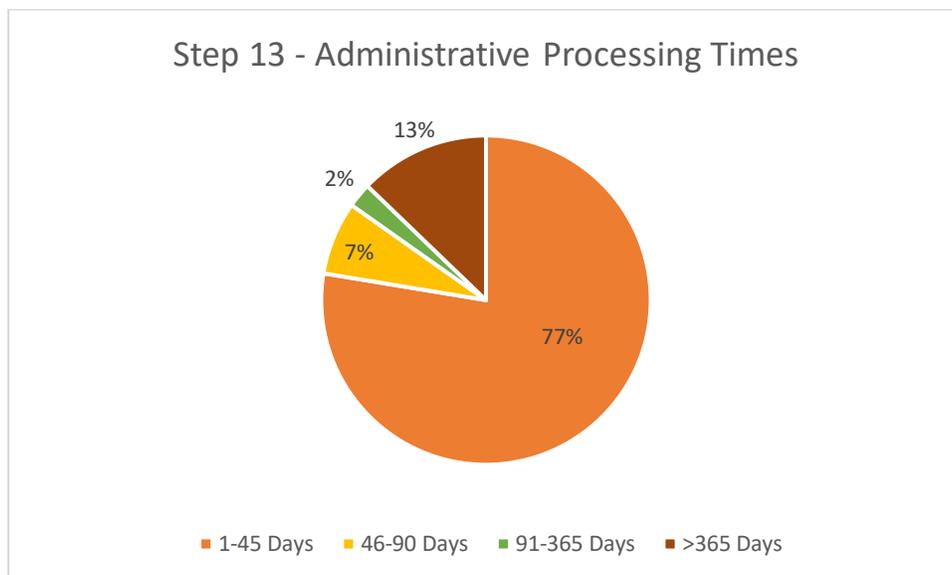
<sup>12</sup> Line 13 totals include data for SIV applicants who completed administrative processing between January 1, 2021 and March 31, 2021. Average processing time for cases that remain pending cannot be calculated until they are completed. A high number in this field reflects older cases being completed, not older cases languishing.

<sup>13</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.

## Why are applications pending longer than nine months?

Certain applications may be pending longer than nine months for completion of COM review (Step 4) and administrative processing (Step 13). At these steps, cases are pending more than nine months due to low program staffing and high caseload volume. Additionally, the employment verification and risk assessment conducted during the COM approval process can add significant delays depending on how easy or difficult it is to locate the applicant's employer to confirm the applicant's eligibility for an SIV. A congressionally-mandated prioritization plan obligates State to focus special attention on the higher tiers during the COM approval process. Lower tiers, therefore, wait longer for review and analysis relative to higher tiers.

Administrative processing (Step 13) often involves rigorous background checks, which are essential to the integrity of the SIV program and U.S. national security. This processing may take anywhere from less than 30 days to over a year, depending on the applicant's background. The below chart shows the percentage of cases processed in 45, 90, 365, or over 365 days. Wait times at the COM stage may appear to also increase when there is an increase in the volume of cases processed by COM. The increase in wait time is due to a greater number of older cases being processed, thereby causing the average wait time of an individual case to grow.



Limited staffing during the first quarter of FY2021, as well as insecurity and local safety conditions directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic, decreased the number of SIV interviews and issuances and increased processing times during this quarter. In particular, Embassy Kabul was closed for in-person visa services for a portion of this quarter due to the prevalence of COVID-19 in Afghanistan.

## How many SIV applications are pending as of March 31, 2021?

- Step 1 – 9,260 principal applicants had COM applications pending at NVC. These applicants had submitted some, but not all, of the documents required to apply for COM approval.

- Step 4 – 4,531 principal applicants had applications pending COM approval. These applicants have submitted all of their documents and are being reviewed by the COM committee.
- Step 7 – 575 principal applicants had Form I-360 petitions pending with USCIS.
- Step 11 – 629 principal applicants and 2,755 derivative family members were pending scheduling for visa interviews. Most Afghan applicants will be interviewed at U.S. Embassy Kabul, as they reside in Afghanistan. Applicants who reside outside of Afghanistan will be interviewed at the U.S. embassy or consulate that adjudicates immigrant visa applications for their country of residence.
- Step 13 – Applications for approximately 215 principal applicants and 66 derivative family members were undergoing administrative processing as of March 31, 2021.

### **How many SIV applicants were interviewed in the Second Quarter of FY 2021?**

No Afghan applicants who received COM approval were scheduled for an interview in the second quarter of FY 2021 under section 602(b) of the *Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009*, as amended. This quarter, the U.S. Embassy Kabul scheduled 131 applicants whose interviews had been cancelled in March and April 2020 when the Embassy suspended in-person visa operations due to COVID-19.

### **How many denials were there in the Second Quarter of FY 2021?**

At the end of this quarter, the following numbers of applications were denied at one of the application stages:

- 726 Afghan principal applicants were deemed unqualified to receive COM approval or had the approval revoked during the second quarter of FY 2021. Applicants whose COM applications are denied or revoked can appeal the decision within 120 days of notification. 713 Afghans submitted appeals during the second quarter of FY 2021. Of the appeals adjudicated during this quarter, 112 were approved after the applicant submitted additional information.
- Two principal applicants had a Form I-360 petition denied by USCIS during the second quarter of FY 2021.

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

Denial of a COM application generally occurs for one or more of the following reasons:

- *Failure to establish qualifying employment by or on behalf of the U.S. government, or by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) or a successor mission.* 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-visa-afghans-employed-us-gov.html>.

- *Insufficient documentation.* Applications are denied for this reason if the applicant fails to provide a required document, or if there is a deficiency in a document provided by the applicant.
- *Failure to establish the required length of employment by or on behalf of the U.S. government, or by ISAF or a successor mission, during the period specified in section 602(b) of the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, as amended.* Applicants who submitted applications for COM approval on or before September 30, 2015, must demonstrate one year of qualifying service. Applicants who submitted or submit applications for COM approval on or after October 1, 2015, must demonstrate two years of qualifying service.
- *Failure to establish providing faithful and valuable service to the U.S. government.* Applications denied for this reason generally have involved cases lacking the 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 associated with the applicant that is incompatible with the requirements of the SIV program.* This reason for denial generally relates to information that the applicant engaged in an unlawful, unethical, criminal, or terrorism-related activity.

### **What are the reasons for an I-360 denial?**

Denial of an I-360 petition generally occurs for one or more of the following five reasons<sup>14</sup>:

- Failure to provide a valid Chief of Mission approval letter.
- Failure to establish nationality by providing a proper national identification document, such as an Afghan passport, or Afghan identity document (*taskera*).
- Failure to sign the I-360 petition.
- Failure to provide a valid supervisor or flag officer's letter of recommendation.
- Failure to respond to a Request for Evidence issued by USCIS in the course of its adjudication of the I-360 petition.

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<sup>14</sup> A denial is generally issued after the applicant has been provided notice of any deficiency and the opportunity to rectify any incomplete or missing evidence.