

**The Unified Coordination  
Group Struggled to Track  
Afghan Evacuees  
Independently Departing  
U.S. Military Bases**





**OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**  
Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528 / [www.oig.dhs.gov](http://www.oig.dhs.gov)

September 29, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Alejandro N. Mayorkas  
Secretary  
Department of Homeland Security

FROM: Joseph V. Cuffari, Ph.D. JOSEPH V  
Inspector General CUFFARI

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SUBJECT: *The Unified Coordination Group Struggled to Track  
Afghan Evacuees Independently Departing U.S. Military  
Bases*

Attached for your action is our final report, *The Unified Coordination Group Struggled to Track Afghan Evacuees Independently Departing U.S. Military Bases*. We incorporated the formal comments from the Department of Homeland Security in the final report.

The report contains one recommendation to ensure DHS contacts and counsels Afghan evacuees who independently departed and have not yet completed parole requirements. Your office concurred with this recommendation. Based on information provided in your response to the draft report, we consider this recommendation open and resolved. Once your office has fully implemented the recommendation, please submit a formal closeout letter to us within 30 days so that we may close the recommendation. The memorandum should be accompanied by evidence of completion of agreed-upon corrective actions. Please send your response or closure request to [OIGISPFollowup@oig.dhs.gov](mailto:OIGISPFollowup@oig.dhs.gov).

Consistent with our responsibility under the *Inspector General Act*, we will provide copies of our report to congressional committees with oversight and appropriation responsibility over the Department of Homeland Security.

Please call me with any questions, or your staff may contact Thomas Kait, Deputy Inspector General for Inspections and Evaluations, at (202) 981-6000.

Attachment



# DHS OIG HIGHLIGHTS

## *The Unified Coordination Group Struggled to Track Afghan Evacuees Independently Departing U.S. Military Bases*

September 29, 2022

### Why We Did This Evaluation

We conducted this evaluation to assess DHS' efforts to track Afghan evacuees independently departing U.S. military bases and how independent departures affect immigration status.

### What We Recommend

We made one recommendation to ensure DHS contacts and counsels Afghan evacuees who independently departed and have not yet completed parole requirements.

#### **For Further Information:**

Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202) 981-6000, or email us at [DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov](mailto:DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov)

### What We Found

The Unified Coordination Group (UCG) struggled to track Afghan evacuees who independently departed U.S. military bases designated as "safe havens." Specifically, UCG officials had difficulties documenting when independent departures occurred. Hummingbird, the case tracking system used by UCG officials, was not designed to track independent departures, and data quality issues included missing departure dates and contact information for evacuees. In some instances, officials noticed that Afghan evacuees recorded as present at safe havens had already left.

Some Afghan evacuees independently departed safe havens without completing medical requirements. In addition, the UCG's Independent Departure Task Force did not attempt to locate all Afghan evacuees who independently departed safe havens to verify their compliance with parole conditions. These evacuees could face challenges obtaining long-term immigration status due to their failure to comply with parole conditions or to submit immigration applications.

### DHS Response

DHS concurred with our recommendation. We consider this recommendation resolved and open. Appendix B contains DHS' full response.



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**Abbreviations**

CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
UCG	Unified Coordination Group
USCIS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services



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### Introduction

Between August 20, 2021, and February 19, 2022, the U.S. Government flew approximately 85,000 Afghan evacuees to the United States.<sup>1</sup> These Afghan evacuees arrived at U.S. ports of entry located at Washington Dulles and Philadelphia International Airports. The Department of Homeland Security determined an estimated 12,000 Afghan evacuees had U.S. citizenship or long-term immigration status,<sup>2</sup> including lawful permanent residence or special immigrant visas for assisting the United States in Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) granted the remaining estimated 73,000 evacuees humanitarian parole into the United States,<sup>4</sup> most for 2 years.<sup>5</sup>

DHS established a process to temporarily house Afghan evacuees on military bases in the continental United States, designated as “safe havens,” until nongovernmental organizations helped resettle them into U.S. communities. However, DHS determined that approximately 11,700 of the evacuees departed the safe havens without resettlement assistance; these departures were called independent departures. Our objective was to review DHS’ efforts to track Afghan evacuees who independently departed safe havens and how independent departures affect evacuees’ immigration status.

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<sup>1</sup> *Operation Allies Welcome Daily Report*, Feb. 19, 2021. This was the largest U.S. evacuation of a wartime ally since the evacuation of 130,000 Vietnamese from South Vietnam in 1975. *Afghanistan, Iraq, Vietnam: How the U.S. Has Resettled Its Wartime Allies*, Council on Foreign Relations, Sep. 28, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> DHS led the interagency effort to resettle Afghan evacuees. DHS and its interagency partners released reports with data related to the evacuees.

<sup>3</sup> In this report, “long-term immigration status” refers to evacuees who are granted, for example, special immigrant visas, refugee status, or asylum, and/or evacuees who applied for lawful permanent residence and received a favorable decision.

<sup>4</sup> Humanitarian parole is a discretionary immigration mechanism provided “on a case-by-case basis” that grants foreign nationals who are otherwise inadmissible to the United States permission to remain for a designated period and temporary employment authorization” (see *Immigration and Nationality Act* § 212(d)(5)(A), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(d)(5)(A); 8 C.F.R. § 212.5; see also 8 C.F.R. § 274a.12(c)(11)). Parolees are expected to depart the United States when the parole period expires, obtain authorization to re-parole, or apply for another immigration status that will permit them to remain in the United States, such as asylum (see *Immigration and Nationality Act* § 212(d)(5); 8 C.F.R. § 212.5(e)).

<sup>5</sup> On August 23, 2021, the DHS Secretary instructed the CBP Acting Commissioner to parole eligible Afghan nationals into the United States for 2 years, after appropriate vetting. See memorandum from Alejandro N. Mayorkas, DHS Secretary, to Troy Miller, CBP Acting Commissioner, *Guidance for the Immigration Processing of Afghan Citizens During Operations Allies Refuge*, Aug. 23, 2021.



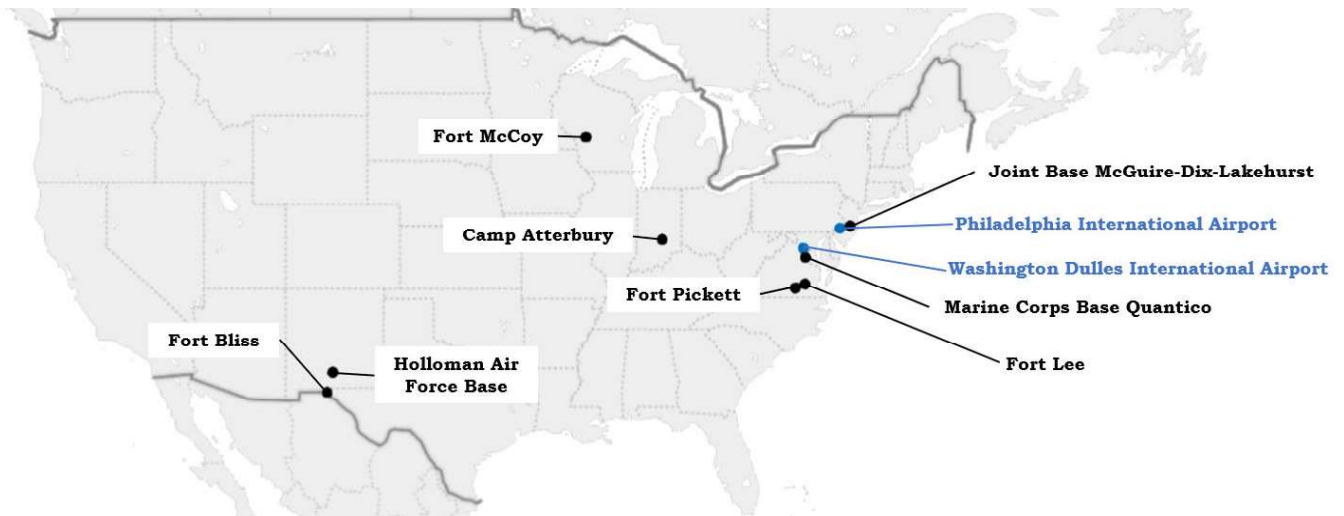
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### Background

DHS led the interagency effort to support and resettle Afghan evacuees. The DHS Secretary established a Unified Coordination Group (UCG)<sup>6</sup> to coordinate efforts to provide Afghan evacuees with temporary housing, vaccinations,<sup>7</sup> a tuberculosis screening, and immigration processing.<sup>8</sup> The UCG Senior Response Official<sup>9</sup> oversaw these operations at eight safe havens, managed by DHS officials, with representatives from the Department of Defense, Department of State, and Department of Health and Human Services. The UCG partnered with nongovernmental organizations known as resettlement agencies, which helped the evacuees at safe havens locate housing and jobs to resettle in the United States. See Figure 1 for a map showing the locations of the eight safe havens and two ports of entry.

**Figure 1. Map of Safe Havens and Ports of Entry**



Source: DHS Office of Inspector General analysis of UCG and DHS documents

<sup>6</sup> According to the *DHS National Response Framework, Fourth Ed.*, Oct. 28, 2019, a UCG is made up of senior leaders representing state, tribal, territorial, insular area, and Federal interests, and in some instances includes local jurisdictions, the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations. A UCG is responsible for determining staffing levels and coordinating staff based on incident requirements. Further, a UCG should include operations, planning, public information, and logistics to integrate personnel for unity of government effort.

<sup>7</sup> The UCG provided vaccinations for mumps, measles, rubella, polio, COVID-19, and other age-appropriate vaccinations.

<sup>8</sup> Immigration processing could include, for example, completing an application for employment authorization.

<sup>9</sup> The Senior Response Official led the UCG and provided direction and guidance to UCG officials.



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All Afghan evacuees had U.S. citizenship, long-term immigration status, or received parole, and they could depart ports of entry<sup>10</sup> or safe havens and could choose to relocate without assistance from a resettlement agency.<sup>11</sup> The UCG referred to departures without assistance from a resettlement agency as “independent departures.” DHS implemented and refined certain conditions for evacuees with parole to lawfully remain in the United States, such as completing vaccinations and a tuberculosis screening.<sup>12</sup>

An estimated 20,300 total evacuees independently departed either a port of entry or a safe haven without assistance from a resettlement agency. Of this total, approximately 8,600 Afghan evacuees independently departed ports of entry rather than proceeding to a safe haven. The remaining 11,700 evacuees independently departed after arriving at a safe haven but before receiving assistance from a resettlement agency. These evacuees at the safe havens left at various stages of the resettlement process,<sup>13</sup> as depicted in Figure 2.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> As an exception, on September 7, 2021, DHS began requiring evacuees with parole to proceed to safe havens to receive vaccinations and a tuberculosis screening, as described later.

<sup>11</sup> The UCG referred to evacuees as “guests,” underscoring the voluntary nature of their participation in the resettlement process.

<sup>12</sup> DHS may set conditions on parole, including compliance with public health measures (see 8 C.F.R. § 212.5(c)). As discussed later in the report, DHS implemented and refined its medical requirements for evacuees with parole between August 20 and September 7, 2021. Evacuees with U.S. citizenship and long-term immigration status were not subject to these medical requirements.

<sup>13</sup> We identified data quality issues related to certain stages of the resettlement process, such as evacuees completing medical requirements, as discussed below. As a result, we cannot determine the total number of Afghan evacuees who completed each stage of the process.

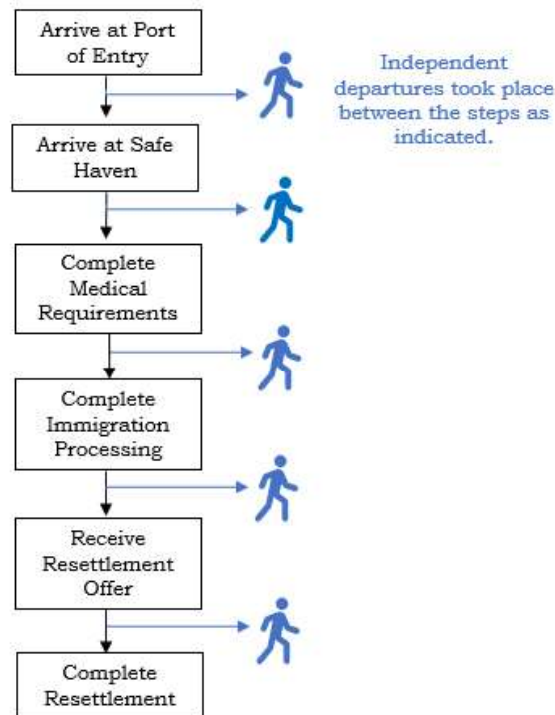
<sup>14</sup> For example, some Afghan evacuees independently departed safe havens after receiving a resettlement offer. With high housing costs and resettlement agencies’ limited resources in areas with an established Afghan community, such as Sacramento, CA, and northern Virginia, some Afghan evacuees were offered resettlement in communities outside of these areas where they had no established ties. In these instances, some Afghan evacuees rejected the resettlement offers and independently departed safe havens.



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**Figure 2. Stages of Independent Departures**



Source: DHS OIG analysis of UCG documents

The UCG officials located at each safe haven established their own processes for meeting with Afghan evacuees electing to independently depart and for recording data on their departures, and on September 9, 2021, officials received instruction to record the information in Hummingbird, a Department of State case tracking system. During these independent departure meetings, UCG officials offered to counsel the evacuees about the benefits they would forego if they left the UCG’s resettlement process, including immigration processing, facilitated travel to U.S. communities, and help locating housing and jobs. The UCG officials also offered to counsel the evacuees with parole about the need to comply with parole conditions after their departure, which could include completing medical requirements.<sup>15</sup> UCG data indicates that more than 95 percent of the evacuees received this counseling before independently departing safe havens.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> DHS medical requirements for Afghan evacuees with parole evolved over time, as discussed later in the report.

<sup>16</sup> UCG data reflects that 2.4 percent of evacuees did not receive counseling, and UCG data on counseling is missing for 2 percent of evacuees. See Figure 3.





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In early September 2021, UCG officials discussed creating a task force to ensure all evacuees with parole met their parole conditions. On September 8, 2021, the UCG Senior Response Official sent an email to the U.S. Immigration and Customs and Enforcement (ICE) Acting Director stating the task force should focus on evacuees with parole “departing [U.S.] facilities that did not comply with conditions ... to ensure that [the UCG is] able to verify a 100% [sic] received vaccinations.”

Following these discussions, the UCG established the Independent Departure Task Force (Task Force), located in DHS headquarters, to assist with verifying that evacuees who had already independently departed complied with parole conditions. The UCG management plan, which provided work assignments to offices within the UCG, instructed the Task Force to “[l]ocate and verify completion of parole requirements for all [i]ndependent [d]epartures.” In addition, the UCG developed guidance on how to deliver parole compliance information to Afghan evacuees who independently departed ports of entry and safe havens.

The Task Force, made up of four ICE officers serving as Director, Deputy Director, and two additional members,<sup>17</sup> sought to identify the current locations of Afghan evacuees with parole who independently departed. The Task Force then either asked ICE officers in field offices to deliver information to them on how to meet their parole requirements or delivered the information electronically via email.

### **Results of Evaluation**

The UCG struggled to track Afghan evacuees who independently departed safe havens. UCG officials had difficulties documenting when independent departures occurred. Additionally, the Hummingbird system was not designed to track independent departures, and data quality issues included missing departure dates and contact information for evacuees. In some instances, officials noticed that Afghan evacuees recorded as present at safe havens had already left.

Some Afghan evacuees independently departed safe havens without completing medical requirements. In addition, the Task Force did not attempt to locate all Afghan evacuees who independently departed safe havens to verify their compliance with parole conditions. These evacuees could face challenges

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<sup>17</sup> The Director and Deputy Director were the only two members assigned day-to-day management and planning responsibilities. The other two members provided temporary assistance.



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obtaining long-term immigration status due to their failure to comply with parole conditions or to submit immigration applications.

### **Safe Havens Had Difficulties Tracking Independent Departures**

As the Afghan evacuees arrived, UCG officials at each safe haven established their own processes to meet with evacuees electing to independently depart and record data on their departures, including their U.S. points of contact, destination addresses, and departure dates.<sup>18</sup> UCG officials initially recorded this information in various ways at each safe haven, such as on paper or in Excel spreadsheets, but received instruction from the DHS Chief Information Officer on September 9, 2021, to record the information in Hummingbird.

Our analysis of Hummingbird data identified missing or erroneous information for Afghan evacuees who independently departed each of the safe havens. For example, the data in Hummingbird did not contain departure dates for more than 100 independent departures, while Hummingbird listed January 1, 1900, as the departure date for 11 others. Additionally, we observed independent departure data fields missing the following:

- first, middle, and last names;
- alien registration numbers;
- contact information;
- whether the evacuees received independent departure counseling; or
- whether the evacuees completed medical requirements.

When UCG officials received Hummingbird access, the system initially lacked important data fields, such as a field for the destination of Afghan evacuees independently departing and a field for compliance with medical requirements. Although the UCG later added these fields, one UCG official said she was not confident that safe havens updated the fields with data from individuals who previously independently departed.<sup>19</sup> Another official said system updates, which added medical fields, created a technical issue that erased prior data entries, which they needed to reenter.

The process of tracking independent departures for one safe haven in particular demonstrates the difficulties that UCG officials encountered. In

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<sup>18</sup> Resettlement agency staff provided assistance holding these meetings and recording independent departure data.

<sup>19</sup> This official explained that she was impressed with how quickly the UCG began using a system that was not originally designed for recording this information. She said she does not think the UCG could have performed better unless it had more time to plan for the resettlement effort.



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January and February 2022, resettlement agency staff informed UCG officials at the Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst safe haven that they could not locate some Afghan evacuees to provide resettlement assistance. UCG officials attempted to locate them by posting the evacuees' names in a common area at the safe haven, messaging a mobile application used by the evacuees, and calling the evacuees or their U.S. points of contact. After these efforts, the Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst safe haven determined that some of the evacuees had already departed:

- On January 19, 2022, a UCG official determined that three evacuees had departed in September, but he could not confirm the specific date of each departure.
- On January 28, 2022, the official attempted to contact an evacuee and determined, “[t]here is no way [the evacuee] is still on base.... He had a phone number listed but it goes unanswered.” The official said he felt “comfortable marking [the evacuee] as departed.”
- On February 10, 2022, the official determined that two evacuees “were confirmed not to be on base,” but it was “[u]ndetermined when they left or how.”

The UCG official who attempted to contact these evacuees informed us that the safe haven initially failed to establish good record-keeping procedures, and evacuees “were likely allowed to [independently depart] without counseling or were counseled but their departure was not documented.” He explained that the safe haven recorded information on paper before it had access to Hummingbird, and when the safe haven received access to Hummingbird and transferred data to the system, the data quality was poor. When another UCG official at this safe haven attempted to contact evacuees to determine whether they had already left, he noted that many had missing contact information. As a result, UCG officials at the Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst safe haven were unable to contact all Afghan evacuees who independently departed to determine when and how they left.

A UCG official at the Holloman Air Force Base safe haven told us that officials at the safe haven realized certain Afghan evacuees had independently departed after they missed appointments related to their resettlement process. He said the UCG tried to identify how many evacuees had already left the Holloman Air Force Base safe haven and determined that approximately 20 evacuees listed in Hummingbird were no longer at the safe haven.



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**Some Afghan Evacuees Independently Departed Safe Havens without Completing Medical Requirements**

Some Afghan evacuees were able to independently depart safe havens without completing the necessary medical requirements. DHS has the authority to require public health measures as a condition of parole.<sup>20</sup> During the first weeks of the resettlement effort, DHS implemented and refined its medical requirements, including vaccinations and a tuberculosis screening, for Afghan evacuees paroled into the United States, as described below:

- From August 20 to 24, 2021, DHS did not make medical requirements a condition of parole for Afghan evacuees.<sup>21</sup>
- From August 25 to September 6, 2021, DHS made vaccinations and a tuberculosis screening within 7 days of arrival a condition of parole but gave evacuees the option of independently departing ports of entry or safe havens and completing medical requirements on their own.<sup>22</sup>
- On September 7, 2021, following an outbreak of measles among evacuees awaiting travel to the United States and at several safe havens, DHS required evacuees to receive vaccinations and a tuberculosis screening at the safe havens before independently departing, as a condition of their parole.

The UCG estimated that “fewer than 600” of the 45,000 Afghan evacuees who arrived between August 25 and September 6, 2021, independently departed without completing medical requirements.<sup>23</sup> Because the safe havens had difficulties recording when independent departures occurred, as discussed above, we cannot confirm whether this estimate is correct.

The DHS Chief Medical Officer told us there were “very little to no concerns of risk” to public health because the “overwhelming majority” of Afghan evacuees received vaccinations following DHS’ changes to medical requirements. Nonetheless, the UCG established the Task Force and instructed the Task Force to verify evacuees’ parole compliance.

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<sup>20</sup> 8 C.F.R. § 212.5(c).

<sup>21</sup> The UCG estimated that 500 evacuees with parole arrived during this timeframe. DHS required the remaining evacuees with parole to meet medical requirements.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services developed a website where evacuees could report that they completed their medical requirements.

<sup>23</sup> These Afghan evacuees lawfully left the resettlement process. However, if they did not complete their medical requirements within 7 days, they would have violated their parole. After September 6, 2021, Afghan evacuees could not lawfully independently depart without completing medical requirements.



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**The Task Force Did Not Consistently Verify Parole Compliance for Evacuees Who Independently Departed Safe Havens**

As described earlier, the UCG instructed the Task Force to locate and verify completion of parole requirements for all evacuees who independently departed. On September 21, 2021, a senior UCG official sent an email to Task Force members with a spreadsheet of Afghan evacuees with parole who independently departed Washington Dulles International Airport. The spreadsheet was missing addresses and contact information for many evacuees, and Task Force members were responsible for finding the missing data and delivering information to the evacuees about parole compliance. In the email, the senior UCG official wrote that in addition to the data for evacuees who independently departed from the Washington Dulles International Airport, “[l]et’s ... work with [the Philadelphia International Airport] and the [safe havens] to get the info they have” regarding independent departures.

Instead, the Task Force focused mainly on locating and verifying parole compliance for only the Afghan evacuees who independently departed from Washington Dulles International Airport. For example, in October 2021, when the Task Force asked ICE officers in field offices to locate 67 Afghan evacuees who independently departed to verify their parole compliance, 65 had departed from Washington Dulles International Airport. Similarly, in December 2021, when the Task Force asked ICE officers to locate 21 Afghan evacuees who independently departed, all had departed from Dulles. On December 13, 2021, a UCG official informed the Task Force Deputy Director about an additional 93 Afghan evacuees who departed the Fort Bliss safe haven without completing medical requirements. In response, the Task Force Deputy Director requested and received the data on these evacuees and added them to a list of evacuees whom the Task Force planned to contact.<sup>24</sup>

We are not aware of the other seven safe havens providing independent departure data to the Task Force,<sup>25</sup> and the Task Force’s list of evacuees to contact never included data from safe havens other than Fort Bliss. The Task Force Director said he did not recall receiving instructions to contact all Afghan

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<sup>24</sup> At the time of our review, the Task Force confirmed that some evacuees who independently departed Fort Bliss completed their parole requirements, and the Task Force was trying to locate the other evacuees.

<sup>25</sup> Additionally, although the UCG issued daily reports about the total number of independent departures, these reports did not include data on how many Afghan evacuees independently departed without completing medical requirements.

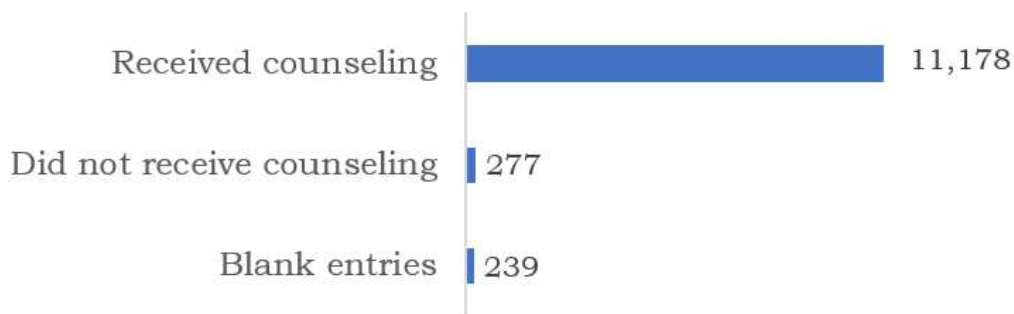


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evacuees independently departing from safe havens.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the Task Force Deputy Director<sup>27</sup> said he understood the UCG had already counseled these individuals about complying with parole conditions when they left the safe havens.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the Task Force Deputy Director’s belief that all individuals had been counseled prior to leaving a safe haven, we found evidence that this was not always the case. As shown in Figure 3, Hummingbird data reflected that 277 Afghan evacuees independently departed safe havens without counseling (2.4 percent of independent departures).<sup>29</sup> Hummingbird was missing counseling data for another 239 Afghan evacuees (2.0 percent of independent departures), and we could not determine whether they also did not receive counseling.

**Figure 3. Counseling Data for Safe Haven Independent Departures**



Source: DHS OIG analysis of UCG documents

**Afghan Evacuees Who Independently Departed Could Face Challenges Obtaining Long-Term Immigration Status**

Recipients of humanitarian parole are expected to depart the United States when the parole period expires, obtain authorization to re-parole, or apply for long-term immigration status. Afghan evacuees who independently departed

<sup>26</sup> It is unclear why the Task Force Director did not recall these instructions, as he had received the September 21, 2021 email instructing the Task Force to request lists of independent departures from safe havens.

<sup>27</sup> This Deputy Director replaced the original Task Force Deputy Director in January 2022.

<sup>28</sup> As discussed previously, counseling included informing evacuees with parole about the need to comply with parole conditions after their departure, such as completing medical requirements.

<sup>29</sup> We identified data quality issues in Hummingbird, as stated previously, and cannot confirm the accuracy of Hummingbird’s counseling data. As a result of issues identified by a UCG official with the quality of medical requirements data, we did not assess how many Afghan evacuees who independently departed without counseling also did not complete their medical requirements.



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and did not receive parole compliance information could face challenges obtaining long-term immigration status.<sup>30</sup>

Resettlement agencies at the safe havens could help evacuees find legal aid for assistance applying for long-term immigration status. After leaving, Afghan evacuees who independently departed could still contact resettlement agencies and request assistance obtaining legal aid. However, the UCG noted in counseling materials for independent departures that “it could take several weeks or months to get an appointment or you may not be able to be served at all.”

Although U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) periodically reports to Congress on the immigration status of Afghan evacuees,<sup>31</sup> DHS does not track independent departures separately from other types of evacuees. DHS, therefore, does not have an estimate of the number of Afghan evacuees who independently departed and have not yet applied for long-term immigration status. DHS has discretion to re-parole evacuees as needed, which would provide evacuees with more time to apply. However, authorizing re-parole is not guaranteed.

DHS could revoke parole for Afghan evacuees who did not complete medical requirements. Although the UCG guidance on how to deliver parole compliance information includes procedures for DHS to revoke parole for noncompliance, we found no indication DHS had taken such measures. Nonetheless, the UCG’s requirement to locate and counsel these evacuees will help ensure they are knowledgeable about their parole conditions.

### **Conclusion**

The UCG developed processes to record when independent departures occurred, locate Afghan evacuees after their independent departures, and verify their parole compliance. However, the UCG officials at safe havens had difficulties tracking when Afghan evacuees independently departed safe havens, and the Task Force did not attempt to locate all Afghan evacuees who independently departed safe havens to verify their parole compliance. Evacuees could face challenges obtaining long-term immigration status due to their failure to comply with parole conditions or to submit immigration applications.

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<sup>30</sup> In a separate review, OIG is evaluating USCIS’ preparation to adjudicate requests for long-term legal status.

<sup>31</sup> *Afghanistan Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2022* (P.L.117-43), Sept. 30, 2021, Title V, Section 2503, Reporting Requirement.



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### Recommendation

**Recommendation 1:** We recommend the DHS Secretary ensure U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services:

- identify Afghan evacuees who independently departed safe havens, were not on the Task Force’s list of evacuees to contact, and have not yet completed medical requirements; and
- provide Afghan evacuees with counseling on their parole requirements.

### Management Comments and OIG Analysis

In response to our draft report, DHS concurred with our recommendation and described corrective actions to address the issues we identified. We consider the recommendation resolved and open. Appendix B contains DHS’ management comments in their entirety. We also received technical comments on the draft report and revised the report as appropriate.

DHS expressed concerns with our portrayal of the Task Force’s scope of work; specifically, that we found the Task Force did not attempt to locate all Afghan evacuees who independently departed safe havens to verify their compliance with parole conditions. DHS explained that the Task Force “focused its efforts” on Afghan evacuees who independently departed from the airport, rather than safe havens, based on its understanding of the instructions. However, documentation provided by the UCG, including the work assignments in the UCG management plan, UCG guidance on delivering parole compliance information, and additional instructions to the Task Force, directed the Task Force specifically to locate evacuees who independently departed safe havens.

DHS also disagreed that Afghan evacuees who independently departed safe havens “will not know how to comply with parole conditions.” DHS stated that CBP provided information to Afghan evacuees about their parole conditions at ports of entry, and USCIS and DHS websites provided parole information for Afghan evacuees. However, the UCG also took steps to counsel evacuees who independently departed safe havens and established the Task Force to verify their parole compliance. This indicates that steps taken at ports of entry and on websites were not sufficient for providing information to evacuees about parole conditions. Based on the UCG’s requirement to locate and counsel Afghan evacuees who independently departed, we concluded that Afghan evacuees who did not receive this counseling could face challenges obtaining long-term immigration status.





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A summary of DHS' response to our recommendation and our analysis follows.

**Recommendation 1:** We recommend the DHS Secretary ensure U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services:

- identify Afghan evacuees who independently departed safe havens, were not on the Task Force's list of evacuees to contact, and have not yet completed medical requirements; and
- provide Afghan evacuees with counseling on their parole requirements.

**DHS Response to Recommendation 1:** Concur. DHS has already taken, or will take, steps to provide counseling on parole requirements to Afghan evacuees with parole. For example, USCIS External Affairs Directorate will further amplify its public information campaign regarding the importance of compliance. USCIS Field Operations Directorate will continue to issue Requests for Evidence to Afghan evacuees with parole who have applied for Adjustment of Status in the United States and are determined to have not yet fulfilled the medical conditions of their parole. USCIS Asylum Division will instruct its asylum officers to remind Afghan evacuees with parole who have applied for asylum in the United States about their parole conditions and provide them an information sheet. USCIS will also notify Afghan evacuees applying for re-parole of the requirement to complete the medical conditions of their parole if they have not yet done so.

In addition, ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations will establish procedures to provide counseling on parole requirements upon encountering Afghan evacuees with parole who independently departed safe havens between August 25, 2021, and September 6, 2021, who have not yet completed their medical requirements, and were not on the Task Force's list of parolees to contact.

DHS estimates completion by December 30, 2022.

**OIG Analysis:** We consider these actions responsive to the recommendation, which is resolved and open. ICE's proposed actions include identifying Afghan evacuees who independently departed safe havens, were not on the Task Force's list of evacuees to contact, and have not yet completed medical requirements, but only counseling them if an ICE encounter occurs. We will close this recommendation when we receive documentation showing that DHS has implemented its proposed steps to provide counseling to Afghan evacuees, including steps to identify Afghan evacuees who meet the criteria and proactively deliver parole compliance information.



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Department of Homeland Security

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### **Appendix A**

#### **Objective, Scope, and Methodology**

The Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General was established by the *Homeland Security Act of 2002* (Pub. L. No. 107-296) by amendment to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*.

Our objective was to review DHS efforts to track Afghan evacuees departing safe havens without assistance from resettlement agencies and how these departures affect Afghan evacuees' immigration status.

We reviewed more than 300 documents related to independent departures. These included:

- policies, procedures, and guidance in draft and final form related to independent departures;
- information provided to evacuees who independently departed, including information on parole requirements provided by CBP and counseling documents provided by USCIS, the Department of State, and the Task Force;
- correspondence within the UCG regarding tracking and counseling evacuees who independently departed; and
- information provided to members of Congress and the media about independent departures.

We collected and analyzed data on Afghan evacuees who independently departed ports of entry and safe havens, including spreadsheets developed by the Department of State and the Task Force, and data obtained from the Hummingbird data system.

We conducted more than 30 interviews with relevant DHS employees, other Federal employees, and nongovernmental organization representatives.

We coordinated with other OIG teams within DHS and seven other departments conducting reviews related to Afghan evacuees.

We conducted our fieldwork between January and April 2022 under the authority of the *Inspector General Act of 1978*, as amended, and according to the *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency.



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**Appendix B**  
**DHS Comments to the Draft Report**

U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528



**Homeland  
Security**

September 9, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: Joseph V. Cuffari  
Inspector General

FROM: Jim H. Crumacker, CIA, CFE  
Director  
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

**JIM H  
CRUMPACKER**

Digitally signed by JIM H  
CRUMPACKER  
Date: 2022.09.09 13:01:02  
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SUBJECT: Management Response to Draft Report: “The Unified  
Coordination Group Struggled to Track Afghan Evacuees  
Independently Departing U.S. Military Bases”  
(Project No. 22-018-ISP-SEC)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS or the Department) appreciates the work of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

DHS leadership is pleased to note OIG’s recognition that the Unified Coordination Group (UCG) developed processes to record and counsel Afghan nationals about the benefits they would forgo if they independently departed the UCG’s resettlement process. Operation Allies Welcome (OAW) was, and continues to be, a historic undertaking for DHS. Specifically, on August 29, 2021, President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. directed the Secretary of Homeland Security to lead coordination of ongoing efforts across the federal government to resettle vulnerable Afghans, including those who worked on behalf of the United States (U.S.).<sup>1</sup> The Secretary was also directed to establish a UCG and name a Senior Response Official (SRO) to lead these efforts, which was done that same day.

Since its establishment, OAW has been a whole-of-government effort, the largest such effort since 1975, to resettle more than 86,000 vulnerable Afghans to the U.S. over the past year. Before Afghan evacuees were approved to travel and enter the U.S., they underwent a rigorous and multi-layered screening and vetting process that began overseas before individuals were permitted to board a plane to the U.S. As with other arrivals at

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/08/29/memorandum-on-the-designation-of-the-department-of-homeland-security-as-lead-federal-department-for-facilitating-the-entry-of-vulnerable-afghans-into-the-united-states/>



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U.S. ports of entry, Afghan nationals completed a primary inspection upon arriving at a U.S. airport. This inspection was conducted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers and included additional biographic and biometric checks. All parolees are subject to recurrent vetting, as are other foreign nationals visiting the U.S., to further enable the federal government to identify and appropriately act upon any information of concern. This included more than 77,000 Afghans who were paroled into the U.S. by CBP under Operation Allies Refuge (OAR) and later under OAW.<sup>2</sup> Within two weeks of being named the lead federal agency for OAW, DHS coordinated the support, care, and security for nearly 54,000 Afghans who were temporarily housed at eight military bases (or “safe havens”) around the country. These designated safe havens provided a range of services, including medical care and testing, vaccinations, mental health services, and immigration processing, while the Afghan nationals waited to be connected to resettlement services.

The timeline of events discussed in this response are outlined in detail below.

- August 25, 2021: The UCG placed medical conditions on arriving Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. via to OAR/OAW, including requiring Afghan nationals to obtain age-appropriate vaccinations and a tuberculosis screening within 7 days of arrival;
- September 2, 2021: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a memorandum<sup>3</sup> to the SRO recommending that medical screening, including all age-appropriate vaccines and tuberculosis testing for Afghans arriving to the U.S. under OAW be conducted at a federal facility;
- September 5, 2021: The SRO issued a memorandum<sup>4</sup> requiring Afghan nationals paroled pursuant to OAW to undergo the medical screening (as suggested by CDC) as a condition of their parole at a safe haven;
- September 7, 2021: The new parole conditions were implemented by UCG officials, and CBP updated the information sheet issued to Afghan nationals at ports of entry to include these parole conditions; and
- September 8, 2021: The SRO directed U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to form the Independent Departure Task Force (IDTF).

As the UCG placed medical conditions on all arriving Afghan nationals who were paroled into the U.S. starting on August 25, 2021, each Afghan national was informed of these conditions in writing, in English, Dari, and Pashto, through an informational sheet provided by CBP personnel at the port of entry. In addition, U.S. Citizenship and

<sup>2</sup> Parolees mentioned throughout this document refer solely to those individuals paroled into the U.S. by CBP pursuant to OAR and OAW.

<sup>3</sup> “Public Health Recommendation for Medical Screening,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, dated September 2, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> “Medical Requirements for Operation Allies Welcome,” SRO, UCG, dated September 5, 2021.



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Immigration Services (USCIS) developed a website<sup>5</sup> for Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. to register their compliance with the medical requirements. On September 2, 2021, four days after DHS was named the lead of the UCG, the CDC Director's memorandum to the OAW SRO recommended that the UCG institute a process that required all arriving Afghan nationals (other than U.S. citizens and returning lawful permanent residents) to complete a medical screening process at a federal center, rather than allowing them to leave the federal facility in order to seek the required processing in the local community.

In response to the CDC's memorandum, the SRO also issued a memorandum that required all arriving Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. to be transported to the safe havens to receive all age-appropriate vaccinations, including the measles-mumps-rubella and COVID-19 vaccines, and a tuberculosis screening at the safe havens as a condition of their parole. The UCG immediately implemented these new requirements and communicated the revised conditions of parole, in writing, through information sheets provided to Afghans at the time of processing by CBP at the port of entry, beginning September 7, 2021. USCIS<sup>6</sup> and DHS<sup>7</sup> websites were also updated to reflect these revised requirements, and the information sheets and related websites included translations in Dari and Pashto.

It is important to note, however, that although each safe haven initially established its own processes to meet with independently departing Afghan nationals and to record data on those departures, the SRO issued a memorandum on October 18, 2021,<sup>8</sup> recommending that data on independent departures be captured solely in the Hummingbird database. This was intended to create consistent data collection procedures across all eight safe havens, as well as encourage orderly processing of independent departures. Procedures and materials developed for independent departure counseling were then formalized across all safe havens by October 29, 2021.

DHS also believes it is important to emphasize that Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. who did choose to independently depart had been provided information about parole conditions in several ways at the time of their parole. This includes information sheets provided in their native language at time of entry, as well as providing advice and encouragement at safe havens to complete medical requirements from individuals such as cultural competency advisors, who assisted in communicating with Afghan nationals at the safe havens. DHS also developed materials such as an Information Sheet for Afghan Parolees Departing Safe Havens<sup>9</sup> issued at the safe havens to Afghan nationals paroled

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/vaccination-status>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/information-for-afghan-nationals>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dhs.gov/allieswelcome>

<sup>8</sup> "Safe Haven Data Collection on 'Independent Departures,'" UCG, SRO, dated October 18, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/fact-sheets/Information\\_Sheet\\_for\\_Afghans\\_Departing\\_Safe\\_Havens-English.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/fact-sheets/Information_Sheet_for_Afghans_Departing_Safe_Havens-English.pdf)



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into the U.S. who were considering independent departure, which explained once again the requirements for Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. as part of OAW to complete the medical conditions of their parole. USCIS also created and regularly maintains a landing page on its website for Afghans to find the latest information on conditions of parole, work authorization, seeking asylum or adjustment of status as a special immigrant, and the full range of other immigration issues that could be of assistance to Afghans who independently departed.<sup>10</sup>

As previously noted, the SRO also directed ICE to form the IDTF on September 8, 2021, to verify and encourage compliance with the parole conditions for those Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. who departed U.S. facilities. Although DHS has attempted to clarify to the OIG that the IDTF's assigned scope of work is not accurately reflected in this draft report, the Department is concerned that OIG's report confuses the intent and purpose of the IDTF. For example, the report indicates that the OIG believes the IDTF was instructed to locate and verify completion of parole requirements for all independent departures, including any Afghan national paroled into the U.S. as part of OAW who is found to have independently departed from the arrival airports, transit locations or the safe havens, whether that departure occurred prior to or after the SRO announced the new parole requirements on September 5, 2021.

However, the UCG and IDTF leadership understood the instruction to have been limited to only those Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. who independently departed prior to the implementation of the new requirements on September 7, 2021, when the conditions of parole did not require these Afghans to go to a safe haven. The UCG management plan specifically qualifies the instruction is to locate and verify completion of parole requirements for all independent departures “that have reached or exceeded the 7 days from time of departure from APOE [Airport Port of Entry], Safe Haven or other entry point into the U.S.” (Emphasis added). In addition, a revised UCG management plan was signed by the SRO on March 8, 2022, to further clarify the instruction, directing the IDTF to “[l]ocate Independent Departures that have reached or exceeded the 7 days from time of departure from APOE, Safe Haven or other entry points into the U.S. between the dates of August 20th, 2021, and September 7th, 2021.”<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, the IDTF focused its efforts on the arrivals with the least opportunities to benefit from engagements with UCG personnel that took place at the safe havens, and thus could be at greatest risk of non-compliance—namely, OAW Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. between August 25, 2021, and September 6, 2021 who independently departed from the airport prior to completing all of their vaccinations. Given the more limited opportunities to engage with this group of Afghans, the IDTF largely focused outreach efforts on this population, and either verified compliance or was

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/information-for-afghan-nationals>

<sup>11</sup> “Incident Action Plan,” UCG, dated March 8, 2022.



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able to make direct contact to encourage compliance by providing parole information, to 100 percent of the individuals (or for minors, their parents/adult relatives) referred for outreach by the UCG.

Again, as noted above, Afghans paroled into the U.S. have been provided information about parole conditions in several ways from the time of their parole at the port of entry, through counseling and an information sheet at safe havens, to a regularly maintained landing page and ongoing public awareness outreach. The IDTF efforts and scope were one piece of this layered approach.

Further, the Department believes that the OIG's finding that Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. who independently departed and did not receive parole compliance information could face challenges obtaining long-term immigration status appears to assume that: (1) these Afghans would not know how to comply with the conditions of their parole; and (2) failure to comply with these conditions will negatively impact their ability to obtain long-term status in the U.S. To the contrary, DHS disagrees that the Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. who departed without completing medical processing at safe havens or related counseling will not know how to comply with parole conditions. Not only did DHS inform arriving Afghan nationals of parole conditions in a variety of ways previously mentioned in this letter, but many of the Afghan nationals who independently departed from the airport have registered their compliance with medical requirements on the USCIS-developed website. DHS also continues to provide information to Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. about their status, the medical processing that must be completed to comply with the conditions set on their parole, and detailed explanations on how Afghans nationals can obtain long-term status in the U.S. on both USCIS and DHS public-facing websites, with links to the information provided in Dari and Pashto.

To date, with respect to Afghans paroled through OAW, DHS has not revoked parole, nor precluded access to an immigration benefit due solely to noncompliance with medical parole conditions. DHS's efforts have focused, and continue to focus, on informing Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. about the need to fulfill medical requirements in order to promote the underlying public health goals of the parole conditions. This intention is reflected in the IDTF's communication with Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. urging compliance and provide information to assist them to do so, and in DHS and USCIS website content and accessibility of tools to help Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. to update their vaccination status online. Moreover, this approach is consistent with the institutionalized counseling provided at safe havens and the greater whole-of-government approach for encouraging compliance with medical requirements during other USG touchpoints and interactions with Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S.



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The draft report contained one recommendation, with which DHS concurs. Enclosed find our detailed response to the recommendation. DHS previously submitted technical comments addressing several accuracy, contextual and other issues under a separate cover for OIG's consideration.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Enclosure





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Department of Homeland Security

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**Enclosure: Management Response to Recommendation  
Contained in OIG-22-018-ISP-SEC**

OIG recommended that the Secretary for Homeland Security ensure that ICE and USCIS:

**Recommendation 1:**

- identify Afghan evacuees who independently departed safe havens, were not on the Task Force's list of evacuees to contact, and have not yet completed medical requirements; and
- provide Afghan evacuees with counseling on their parole requirements.

**Response:** Concur. DHS has already taken, or will take, the following steps to provide counseling on the parole requirements to Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. as part of OAW, including individualized counseling whenever an Afghan national who has yet to complete the medical requirements is identified:

1. USCIS External Affairs Directorate will further amplify its already existing public information campaign regarding the importance of compliance, which will include updates to existing webpages and providing existing information sheets to Afghan nationals whenever public forums involving the Afghan community are held, such as Welcome Centers.
2. USCIS Field Operations Directorate will continue to issue Requests for Evidence to Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. as part of OAW who have applied for Adjustment of Status in the U.S. and are determined to have not yet fulfilled the medical conditions of their parole. In completing the medical exam required for adjustment of status, the Afghan national will have complied with the medical conditions placed on their parole.
3. USCIS Asylum Division will instruct its Asylum Officers to ask Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. as part of OAW who have applied for asylum in the U.S. whether they have completed the conditions of their parole into the U.S. and, in any circumstance where it is determined that it is unclear if they have complied, the Asylum Officer will remind the Afghan national of the conditions placed on their parole and provide them an Information Sheet reminding Afghan nationals paroled into the U.S. of the obligation to complete the required vaccinations and medical screening.
4. Should an Afghan paroled pursuant to OAW apply for re-parole, they will be notified of the requirement to complete the medical conditions of their parole if they have not yet done so, referring them to the USCIS.gov site to attest to the



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satisfaction of those conditions once they have obtained the required vaccinations and tuberculosis screening.

5. ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations will establish procedures to provide counseling on parole requirements upon encounter to Afghan nationals paroled into the United States as part of OAW, who independently departed safe havens between August 25, 2021, and September 6, 2021, have not yet completed their medical requirements, and were not on the IDTF's list of parolees to contact.

Estimated Completion Date: December 30, 2022.



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**Appendix C**  
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**Appendix D**  
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