



**Office of Inspector General**  
United States Department of State

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Office of Audits

September 2022

# **Information Report: Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program Metrics**

INFORMATION REPORT

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## SUMMARY OF REVIEW

In 2009, Congress established a visa program to resettle Afghans who had worked on behalf of the United States in Afghanistan and experienced an ongoing and serious threat as a result. The Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 authorized special immigrant visas (SIV) for Afghans who were “employed by, or on behalf of, the [U.S.] Government in Afghanistan;” “provided faithful and valuable service to the [U.S.] Government;” and “experienced or [are] experiencing an ongoing serious threat as a consequence of [their] employment by the [U.S.] Government.”<sup>1</sup>

In the wake of the evacuation and suspension of operations at U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan, on August 31, 2021, multiple congressional committees requested that the Department of State (Department) Office of Inspector General (OIG) review a range of topics regarding the Afghan SIV program.<sup>2</sup> OIG is issuing a series of reports in response to the requests. This information report responds to specific congressional questions involving the Afghan SIV process and related data, including the following: (1) a description of the Afghan SIV process and number of days allotted to complete each step; (2) the number of SIV applications<sup>3</sup> received, approved, and denied annually since enactment of the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 through calendar year 2021; (3) the number of SIV applications approved from April 2021 through August 2021; (4) the number and status of SIV applicants in each phase of the SIV process as of May 31, 2022; and (5) the average time taken to process an SIV application from submission to issuance or denial. All data presented in this information report represent principal applicants only and do not include derivative applicants (i.e., family members) unless otherwise specified.

OIG completed fieldwork for this report in June 2022. In July 2022, the Department and the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) revised the SIV petition process; because that revision occurred after OIG’s fieldwork ended it is not reflected in the historical process summary and data included in this report.

**The Afghan SIV process and number of days allotted to complete each step.** As of June 2022, an Afghan national applicant was required to complete a three-phased process to receive an SIV: Chief of Mission (COM) approval, I-360 petition,<sup>4</sup> and visa application. First, the applicant submitted a COM approval application to the National Visa Center (NVC). Once the applicant provided NVC with all required information, the information was forwarded to the Afghan SIV (ASIV) Unit, where it was reviewed and, if the applicant was qualified, submitted for COM approval. After receiving COM approval, the applicant submitted an I-360 petition to USCIS. Upon approval of the I-360 petition, the applicant submitted a visa application to NVC. A consular officer reviewed the visa application, interviewed the

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<sup>1</sup> Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, Public Law 111-8, March 11, 2009, § 602(b), codified at 8 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 1101 note, “Afghan Allies Protection.”

<sup>2</sup> The congressional request letters are reprinted in Appendix B.

<sup>3</sup> The individual who fulfills the qualifications for the SIV program is the “principal applicant.” A principal applicant may be accompanied by a spouse and children, referred to as “derivative applicants.” All data presented in this information report represent principal applicants only and do not include derivative applicants.

<sup>4</sup> The I-360 petition, provided by USCIS, is for foreign nationals to petition USCIS for special immigrant status.

applicant, and determined whether to issue a visa based on the information provided. Starting on July 20, 2022, new applicants no longer need to file Form I-360 with USCIS. Instead, applicants submit a revised Department nonimmigrant visa application during the COM approval phase. The Afghan Allies Protection Act states that the Department and the Department of Homeland Security should complete the entire SIV process within 9 months of receiving a complete application. However, it does not allocate a specific number of days to complete each step or phase of the Afghan SIV process.

**The number of SIV applications received, approved, and denied annually since enactment of the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 through calendar year 2021.** From 2009<sup>5</sup> through 2021, the Department received 59,977 documentarily complete Afghan SIV applications, from which it subsequently approved and issued 22,085 SIVs (37 percent) and denied<sup>6</sup> 28,821 (48 percent). During this same period, 9,071 (15 percent) applications remained pending.

**The number of SIV applications approved from April 2021 through August 2021.** Within the period beginning with President Biden's April 2021 announcement of the U.S. troop withdrawal through the eventual evacuation and suspension of operations at Embassy Kabul in August 2021, the Department approved and issued 1,754 (eight percent) of the 22,085 SIVs issued since 2009.

**The number and status of SIV applicants in each phase of the SIV process as of May 31, 2022.** As of May 31, 2022, 15,678 Afghan SIV applications were in process: 4,975 in the COM approval phase, 1,095 in the I-360 petition phase, and 9,608 in the visa application phase. It is important to note that the Department does not determine an applicant's physical location until the visa application phase occurs and when arrangements must be made for an interview with the applicant. Therefore, according to Department officials, unless otherwise known, all applications in process are considered to be from applicants within Afghanistan. However, the Department has confirmed that 1,903 (12 percent) of 15,678 Afghan SIV applicants are in the United States or in third countries.<sup>7</sup>

**The average time taken to process an SIV application from submission to issuance or denial.** OIG could not independently calculate the overall average SIV processing time because a key Department data element necessary to calculate processing time for the COM approval phase was not sufficiently reliable and Department application processing systems

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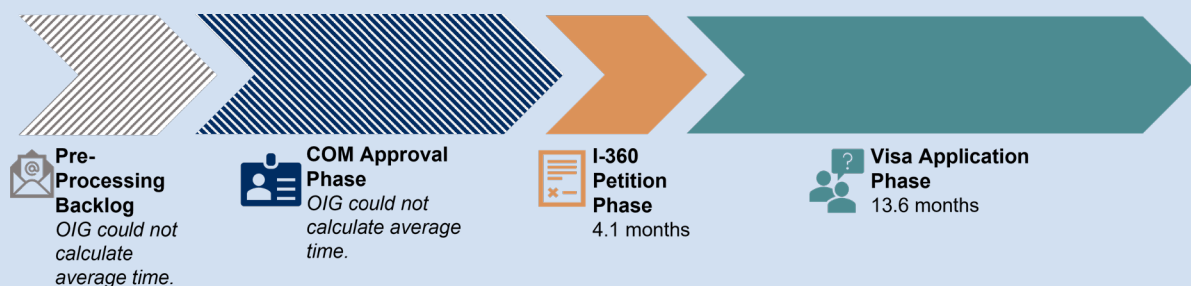
<sup>5</sup> The Department did not track SIV application data prior to December 2010.

<sup>6</sup> SIV applicants may appeal or reapply if denied. Denial statistics include applications later approved on appeal.

<sup>7</sup> According to Department officials, Afghan SIV applicants confirmed to have arrived in the United States or departed from Afghanistan are verified by matching the information listed on SIV application forms with U.S. Customs and Border Patrol arrivals data or noncombatant evacuation operations tracking system data in instances that the Department provided transportation out of Afghanistan.

and the USCIS I-360 petition processing system lacked interoperability.<sup>8</sup> Despite these limitations, OIG was able to reliably calculate the annual average processing time for the I-360 petition phase at 4.1 months (processing times ranged from 0.5 months to 13.7 months) and for the visa application phase at 13.6 months (processing times ranged from 5.5 months to 24.6 months). However, OIG could not reliably calculate the “average time taken to process an [SIV] application from the date of submission to final disposition,” as illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Overall Average Processing Time in Months for Afghan SIV Applications From 2009 Through 2021**



**Source:** Generated by OIG based on analysis of principal applicant data provided by the Bureau of Consular Affairs and USCIS.

The Department provided general comments in response to a draft of this report. Those comments are reprinted in Appendix E, and OIG’s replies to each are presented in Appendix F.

## OBJECTIVE

OIG conducted this review to respond to specific congressional questions involving the Afghan SIV process and related data including the following: (1) a description of the Afghan SIV process and the number of days allotted to complete each step; (2) the number of SIV applications received, approved, and denied annually since enactment of the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 through calendar year 2021; (3) the number of SIV applications approved from April 2021 through August 2021; (4) the number and status of SIV applicants in each phase of the SIV process as of May 31, 2022; and (5) the average time taken to process an SIV application from submission to issuance or denial.

<sup>8</sup> The Department’s quarterly SIV reports include purported COM approval phase processing times, but OIG has previously identified deficiencies in the Department’s method for collecting, verifying, and reporting on applicant wait times. (OIG, *Management Assistance Report: Quarterly Reporting on the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program Needs Improvement* [AUD-MERO-20-34, June 2020].) Additionally, as part of the ongoing series of reports on the Afghan SIV program, OIG conducted a follow-up review of the quarterly reports that identified continuing issues with wait time methodologies (OIG, *Compliance Follow-Up Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program* [AUD-MERO-23-01, October 2022].) The Department’s SIV program quarterly reports are available at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/special-immg-visa-afghans-employed-us-gov.html>.

## BACKGROUND

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In 2009, Congress established an SIV program to resettle Afghans who worked on behalf of the United States through the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009.<sup>9</sup> Since enacted, Congress has authorized extensions of the program on 12 occasions and adjusted eligibility requirements. To qualify for the Afghan SIV program, as of June 2022, an Afghan national must have been employed by or on behalf of the U.S. government in Afghanistan at some point since October 2001 for at least 1 year<sup>10</sup> and provided faithful and valuable service in this capacity, as documented in a letter of recommendation.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the Afghan national must be experiencing or have experienced a serious, ongoing threat as a consequence of the employment. Afghan nationals who were employed with the International Security Assistance Force may also qualify for the SIV program if this service required work for U.S. military personnel.

Following the evacuation and suspension of operations at U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan, on August 31, 2021, multiple congressional committees requested that OIG review a range of topics regarding the Afghan SIV program.<sup>12</sup> OIG is issuing a series of reports in response to the requests. This information report responds to specific congressional questions involving the Afghan SIV process and related data. The congressional request letters are reprinted in Appendix B.

## RESULTS

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### **Afghan SIV Process and Time Allotted To Complete Each Step**

Afghan SIV processing is a shared responsibility of the Department and the Department of Homeland Security's USCIS. As of June 2022, an Afghan SIV application advanced through three separate phases: (1) Chief of Mission (COM) approval, (2) I-360 petition, and (3) visa application. The first and last phases are administered by the Department and the middle phase by USCIS. When a principal applicant successfully completes all three phases in order, an Afghan SIV is issued. Alternatively, the applicant may have an application denied at any stage if he or she fails to meet the eligibility criteria or is deemed ineligible for a visa to the United States. The three phases of the application process as of June 2022 are depicted in Figure 2 and

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<sup>9</sup> The Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, Public Law 111-8, March 11, 2009, codified at 8 U.S.C. § 1101 note, "Afghan Allies Protection."

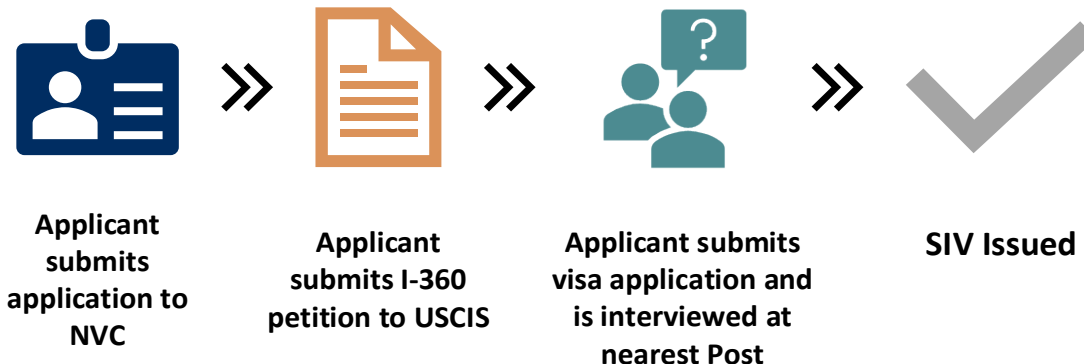
<sup>10</sup> The FY 2016 National Defense Authorization Act increased the service requirement from 1 to 2 years for those individuals applying after September 30, 2015. (National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016, Public Law 114-92, November 25, 2015, Section 1216.) However, the July 30, 2021, Emergency Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021, reduced the service requirement back to 1 year. (Public Law 117-31, Section 401.)

<sup>11</sup> 8 U.S.C. § 1101 note, "Afghan Allies Protection," Section 602(b)(2)(A)(iii).

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Rep. Ami Bera, M.D., Chairman, Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, Central Asia, and Nonproliferation, September 30, 2021; Letter from James E. Risch, Ranking Member, Senate Foreign Relations Committee; James M. Inhofe, Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee; and Rob Portman, Ranking Member, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, October 21, 2021.

further explained in the paragraphs that follow. A flow chart of the entire SIV process by phase is in Appendix C.

**Figure 2: Phases of the Afghan SIV Application Process as of June 2022**



**Note:** An application may be denied at any phase if the applicant fails to demonstrate qualifications for the program or is deemed ineligible for a visa.

**Source:** Generated by OIG from information obtained from congressional legislation including the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, as amended, authorizing the Afghan SIV program and from information obtained from interviews with Department and USCIS officials and Department flow charts depicting the SIV review process.

### Chief of Mission Approval Phase



The Chief of Mission for Afghanistan, or a designee, must conduct an independent review of each SIV application and approve or deny that application, as appropriate.<sup>13</sup> To receive COM approval, an applicant must submit a package of documents demonstrating the applicant's eligibility for the SIV program to NVC.<sup>14</sup> The Afghan SIV process begins with an applicant submitting an email to a dedicated email address at NVC requesting consideration for an SIV. Once the applicant provides NVC with all required information, the COM approval application is considered "documentarily complete,"<sup>15</sup> and NVC forwards it to the Afghan SIV (ASIV) Unit. The

<sup>13</sup> 8 U.S.C. § 1101 note, "Afghan Allies Protection," Section 602(b)(2)(D).

<sup>14</sup> The National Visa Center, located in Portsmouth, NH, is within the Bureau of Consular Affairs, Visa Office, Domestic Operations. The National Visa Center acts at the primary public-facing organization within the Department during the SIV process.

<sup>15</sup> To be documentarily complete, the applicant must provide the following information: (1) evidence of Afghan nationality such as passport or tazkera, which is the Afghan national identity card; (2) verification of employment on behalf of the United States in Afghanistan; (3) an employee badge; (4) a letter of recommendation from a direct U.S. citizen supervisor; (5) Form DS-157 supplemental nonimmigrant visa application; and (6) a statement of threats that may have been received as a consequence of employment. In response to a draft of this report, the Department noted, "On August 25, 2021, the Deputy Chief of Mission for Afghanistan determined that any noncitizen who was employed in Afghanistan by or on behalf of the U.S. government or by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) or any successor mission, has experienced or is experiencing an ongoing serious threat as a consequence of the alien's employment. As a result, Afghan SIV applicants have not needed to submit a statement to establish that they have experienced an ongoing serious threat as part of their COM application."

ASIV Unit<sup>16</sup> is responsible for analyzing an applicant's eligibility for the program by verifying, among other items, history and length of an applicant's employment and a letter of recommendation from the applicant's supervisor. Based on its analysis, the ASIV Unit determines whether an application qualifies for COM approval and makes a recommendation to COM's designated approving official. As of June 2022, the designated approving official was the former Assistant COM for Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup> If the COM, or their designee, denies the application, NVC notifies the applicant and provides the reasons for the COM's decision. An applicant may appeal this denial once within 120 days of notification and provide additional information on the application. According to ASIV Unit officials, an applicant may also reapply an unlimited number of times. If the COM's designated approving official approves the application, NVC notifies the applicant, who may then initiate the I-360 petition.

### **I-360 Petition Phase**



As of June 2022, after receiving COM approval, an applicant submitted an I-360 petition for special immigrant status<sup>18</sup> for processing. In this phase, the applicant may also submit documentation for a derivative spouse or child, if any.<sup>19</sup> USCIS reviews the petition and sends the approved petition to NVC, which notifies the applicant of the approval. If denied, the applicant may file an appeal to USCIS within 30 days of the decision date. Starting on July 20, 2022, new applicants no longer needed to file Form I-360 with USCIS. Instead, applicants submitted a revised Department nonimmigrant visa application during the COM approval phase.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The ASIV Unit, located in Washington, DC, is within the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs Joint Executive Office.

<sup>17</sup> According to the ASIV Unit director, prior to August 2021 the designated approving official reviewed the ASIV Unit recommendations with a committee of other officials at Embassy Kabul. According to ASIV officials, this committee was dissolved in the weeks preceding the withdrawal from Afghanistan in an effort to streamline the COM approval process.

<sup>18</sup> Form I-360, provided by USCIS, is for foreign nationals to petition USCIS for special immigrant status. An Afghan national must successfully petition USCIS before obtaining a special immigrant visa.

<sup>19</sup> 9 Foreign Affairs Manual 502.1-1(C)(2), "Derivative Applicants/Beneficiaries," states that a derivative is, among others, a spouse or child acquired prior to the principal applicant's admission to the United States or adjustment of status to that of a Lawful Permanent Resident.

<sup>20</sup> On July 18, 2022, the Secretaries of State and Homeland Security announced a change to the SIV program to "simplify and streamline the application process for Afghan applicants." This change was implemented after the period of applications OIG reviewed, which ended May 31, 2022; therefore, this report does not address the July 2022 change to the SIV process.



## Visa Application and Petition Phase



If USCIS approves the I-360 petition, the applicant and any derivative family members submit a Form DS-260 visa application<sup>21</sup> to NVC along with supporting documentation. Once documentarily completed, NVC schedules a visa interview at an immigrant visa processing U.S. embassy or consulate accessible to the applicant.<sup>22</sup> A U.S. Consular Officer reviews the visa application and interviews the applicant and any derivative family members in person. Prior to the suspension of operations in August 2021, SIV interviews typically took place at Embassy Kabul. Since then, SIV applicants eligible for a visa interview may be transported by the Department to a location in a third country.<sup>23</sup> Alternatively, applicants may choose to arrange their own travel and request that NVC schedule an interview at an immigrant visa processing U.S. embassy or consulate in a third country.

Once the interview is conducted and based on the information provided as well as a required security screening, the interviewing Consular Officer determines whether to issue the visa. If the Consular Officer determines that a visa should be issued, the applicant and any derivative family members undergo a medical examination<sup>24</sup> and then travel to the United States.<sup>25</sup> If the Consular Officer denies the visa application, the applicant is ineligible for the SIV to travel to the United States.

## Time Allotted To Complete Processing of SIV Applicants

In 2013, Congress amended the Afghan Allies Protection Act to state that “all steps under the control of the respective departments incidental to the issuance of such visas, including required screenings and background checks, should be completed not later than 9 months after the date on which an eligible alien submits all required materials to complete an application for

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<sup>21</sup> Form DS-260, provided by the Department, is the Application for Immigrant Visa and Alien Registration. Applicants fill out this form online through a web-based portal located at <https://ceac.state.gov/ceac/>.

<sup>22</sup> In response to a draft of this report (see Appendix E), the Department asked that OIG provide the following clarification to avoid confusion among SIV applicants: “since the suspension of operations at Embassy Kabul – NVC does not automatically proceed with scheduling the interview until the applicant informs NVC to which processing post the applicant is able to travel and appear for [an] interview.”

<sup>23</sup> Within the Department, the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts facilitates the departure of individuals from Afghanistan to third countries in the Middle East and elsewhere for continued SIV processing.

<sup>24</sup> At Embassy Kabul, SIV applicants underwent a medical examination after the visa interview because circumstances were such that this order was more efficient. However, typically, visa applicants undergo a medical examination ahead of the visa interview so that the interviewing officer is aware of any medical issues.

<sup>25</sup> Afghan nationals who receive SIVs may be accompanied by a spouse and unmarried children under the age of 21, referred to as derivative applicants. The individual who meets the program qualifications is the principal applicant. All data presented in this information report represent principal applicants only and do not include derivative applicants unless otherwise specified.

such visa.”<sup>26</sup> However, the act did not allocate a specific number of days to complete each step or phase of the Afghan SIV process.

#### *Required Quarterly Reports on the Afghan SIV Program*

In the same amendment,<sup>27</sup> Congress also required the Department and Department of Homeland Security to publish quarterly public reports on various aspects of the Afghan SIV program, including the average wait times for an applicant at each stage in the process. OIG previously identified deficiencies in the Department’s method for collecting, verifying, and reporting on applicant wait times in the quarterly reports.<sup>28</sup>

### **Afghan SIV Applications Received, Approved, and Denied – 2009 Through 2021**

When a COM approval application becomes documentarily complete, the applicant is eligible to move forward in the SIV process. The Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) maintains data on SIV applications that are documentarily complete for the COM application. Based on that data, CA reported that 59,977 SIV applications were received by NVC from 2009 through 2021 that were sent forward for COM review. Summary data for the number of complete COM approval applications received, the total visas issued, and the COM applications and visas denied from 2009 through 2021 are provided in Figure 3.<sup>29</sup>

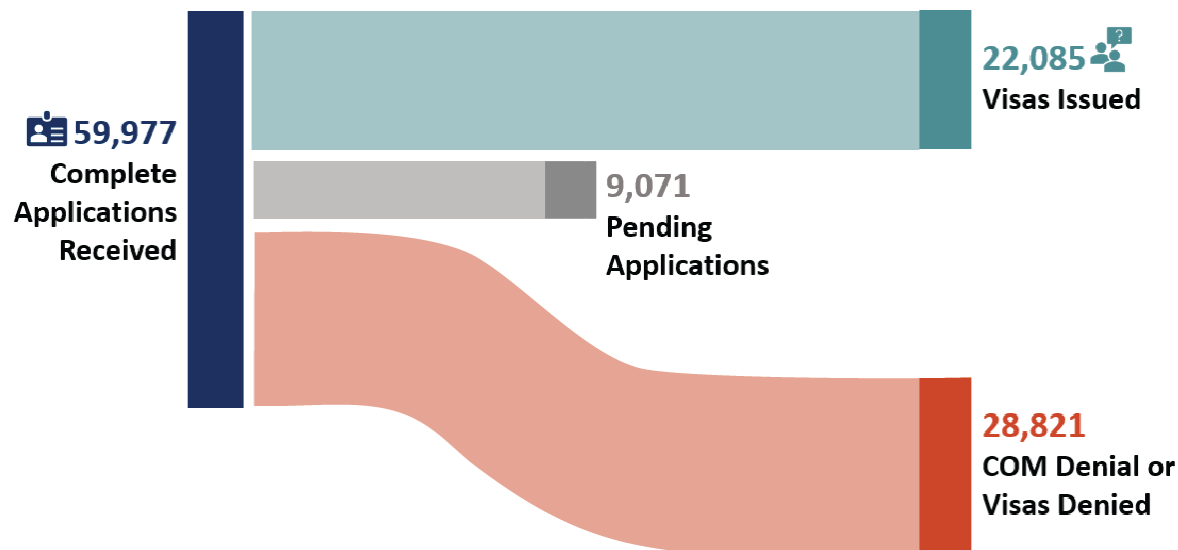
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<sup>26</sup> National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, Public Law 113-66, December 26, 2013, Section 1219, codified at 8 U.S.C. § 1101 note, “Afghan Allies Protection,” Section 602(b)(4)(A). Section 602(b)(4)(B) further states that “nothing in this section shall be construed to limit the ability of a Secretary referred to in subparagraph (A) to take longer than 9 months to complete those steps incidental to the issuance of such visas in high-risk cases for which satisfaction of national security concerns requires additional time.”

<sup>27</sup> National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, Public Law 113-66, December 26, 2013, Section 1219(3), codified at 8 U.S.C. § 1101 note, “Afghan Allies Protection,” Section 602(b)(11)-(12).

<sup>28</sup> OIG, *Management Assistance Report: Quarterly Reporting on the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program Needs Improvement* (AUD-MERO-20-34, June 2020). As part of this series of reports on the Afghan SIV program, OIG conducted a follow-up review of the quarterly reports that identified continuing issues with wait time methodologies. (OIG, *Compliance Follow-Up Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program* [AUD-MERO-23-01, October 2022].) The Department’s SIV program quarterly reports are available at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/special-immg-visa-afghans-employed-us-gov.html>.

<sup>29</sup> OIG identified 9,071 documentarily complete applications that had been received but were neither approved nor denied. As such, OIG considered these applications “pending” because they were either pending processing by the Department or were awaiting additional information from the applicant.

**Figure 3: SIV Applications Received, Approved, and Denied: 2009 - 2021**

**Source:** Generated by OIG based on an analysis of Afghan SIV data provided by CA involving principal applicants only (i.e., Afghan nationals who may be eligible to receive an SIV).

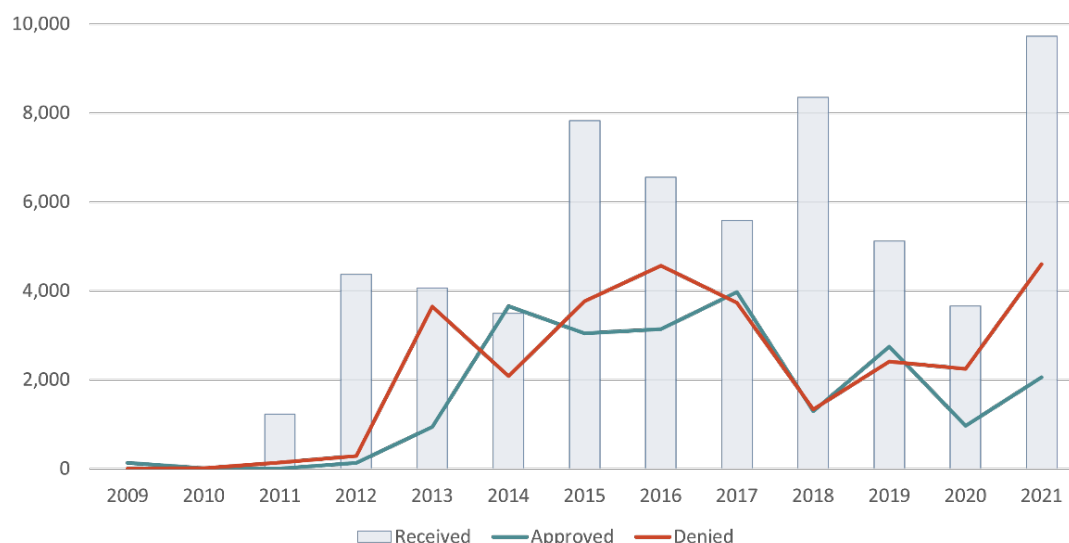
From calendar year 2011 through 2021, the number of documentarily complete COM applications received by COM annually varied widely from a low of 1,226 to a high of 9,729. The number of SIV applications received annually from 2009 through 2021 is detailed in Appendix D, Table D.1. From 2020 through 2021, the number of applications received increased 265 percent, from 3,662 applications to 9,729. The increase may be explained, at least in part, by renewed interest in the SIV program following President Biden's announcement on April 14, 2021, of the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Afghanistan and the subsequent suspension of operations at Embassy Kabul on August 31, 2021.

As of December 31, 2021, the Department issued 22,085 visas (37 percent) of the 59,977 COM applications that were received. Similar to the number of applications received, the number of visas issued annually also varied widely. For example, from calendar year 2009 through 2012, a total of 268 visas were issued. However, between 2013 and 2021, the number of visas the Department issued annually ranged from 938 to 3,975. From 2019 to 2020, visa issuances dropped from 2,748 to 963 but then increased to 2,059 in 2021. According to CA officials, the drop in visa issuances in 2020 may be explained, at least in part, by the fact that Embassy Kabul suspended visa interviews from March 2020 through February 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From calendar year 2009 through 2021, the Department denied 28,821 (48 percent) of the 59,977 Afghan SIV applications at some stage of the SIV process. As an application moves through the SIV process, the application may be denied at any stage if the applicant fails to demonstrate qualifications for the program or is determined to be ineligible for a visa to the

United States.<sup>30</sup> In its quarterly reports to Congress on the Afghan SIV program, the Department stated that applicants who were denied COM approval failed to demonstrate that they had worked for a qualifying employer for at least 1 year or the Department was unable to verify employment and a letter of recommendation.<sup>31</sup> As previously noted, an applicant may appeal this denial once within 120 days of notification and provide additional information on the application.<sup>32</sup> An applicant may also be denied by USCIS at the I-360 petition phase or may be denied a visa by Consular Officers after the visa interview. Of the 28,821 applications denied by the Department, 24,907 (86 percent) were denied during the COM review and 3,914 (14 percent) during the visa interview phase. An additional 399 I-360 petitions were denied between 2009 and 2021 by USCIS during the I-360 petition review. Figure 4 shows the number of applications received, approved, and denied each calendar year from 2009 through 2021.

**Figure 4: Annual SIV Applications Received, Approved, and Denied: 2009 - 2021**



**Source:** Generated by OIG based on an analysis of data provided by CA and USCIS. Pertains only to principal applicants (i.e., Afghan nationals who may be eligible to receive an SIV).

### SIV Applications Approved Between April and August 2021

From April through August 2021, 1,754 principal applicant visas were issued, representing eight percent of the total 22,085 visas issued since 2009. Visa issuance steadily increased from 45 in April 2021, when President Biden announced plans to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan, to a peak of 685 in August 2021, when the evacuation and suspension of operations at Embassy Kabul occurred. Afghan Affairs Unit officials said that, in May and June 2021, Embassy Kabul

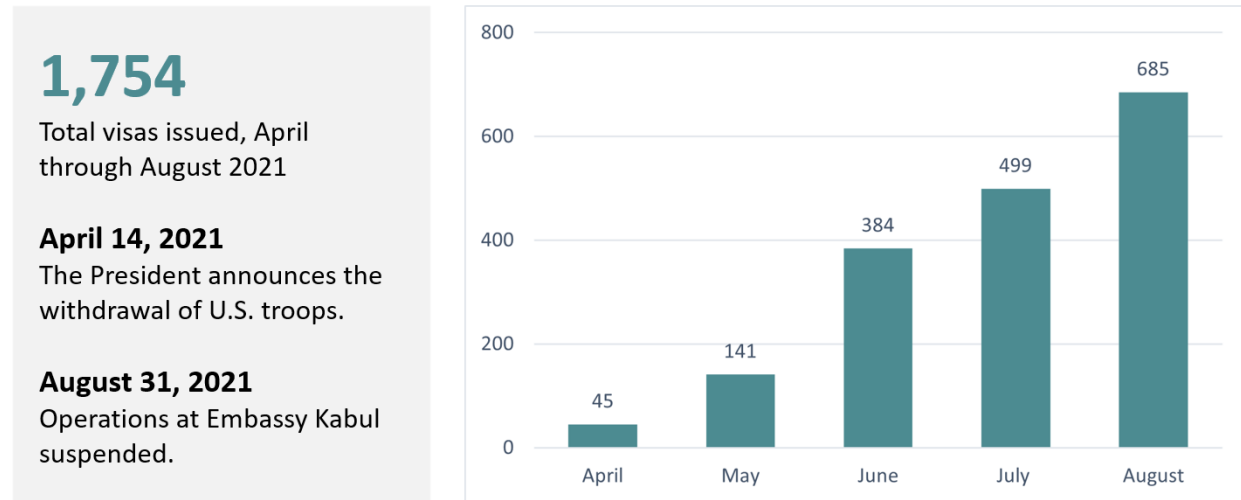
<sup>30</sup> 8 U.S.C. § 1101 note, “Afghan Allies Protection,” Section 602(b)(1), states that to receive an SIV, the applicant must be otherwise eligible to receive an immigrant visa and be otherwise admissible to the United States in addition to meeting the program qualifications. An applicant may be found inadmissible to the United States including on the grounds of national security or terrorist activity concerns.

<sup>31</sup> Joint Department of State/Department of Homeland Security Report: *Status of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program*, pages 8-9 (January 2022).

<sup>32</sup> Denial statistics include applications later approved on appeal.

suspended visa interviews because of a local COVID-19 outbreak. However, even while closed because of COVID, the embassy continued to issue visas for applicants who had already been interviewed. The number of visas issued monthly to principal SIV applicants from April through August 2021 is shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Monthly Afghan SIV Issuances: April Through August 2021**



**Source:** Generated by OIG based on an analysis of Afghan SIV data provided by CA involving only principal applicants (i.e., Afghan nationals who may be eligible to receive an SIV).

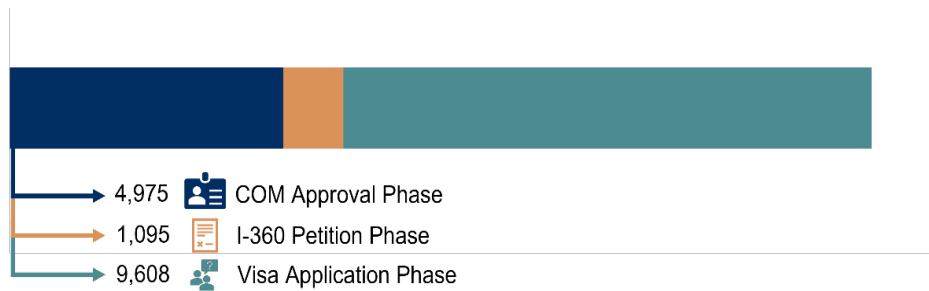
### Number and Status of SIV Applicants in Each Phase of the SIV Process as of May 31, 2022

As of May 31, 2022, the Department reported that 15,678 Afghans had documentarily complete applications in process. Of these 15,678 applicants, 4,975 were in the COM approval phase, 1,095 were in the I-360 petition phase, and 9,608 were in the visa application phase. Of these documentarily complete applications, 13,755 applicants (88 percent) were assumed to still be in Afghanistan, and 1,903 (12 percent) are confirmed to have departed Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup> The number of SIV applicants in process at each application phase is shown in Figure 6.

<sup>33</sup> According to Department officials, Afghan SIV applicants confirmed to have arrived in the United States or departed from Afghanistan are verified by matching the information listed on SIV application forms with U.S. Customs and Border Patrol arrivals data or noncombatant evacuation operations tracking system data in instances that the Department provided transportation out of Afghanistan. Applicants who are not confirmed to have departed are assumed to be in Afghanistan.

**Figure 6: Afghan SIV Applicants in Process by Application Phase****15,678**

Afghan SIV Applicants In Process as of May 31, 2022



**Note:** These data represent the number of documentarily complete principal applicant applications in process as of May 31, 2022. NVC has identified an additional 46,210 applicants who had initiated a case but whose applications were not yet documentarily complete as of May 31, 2022.

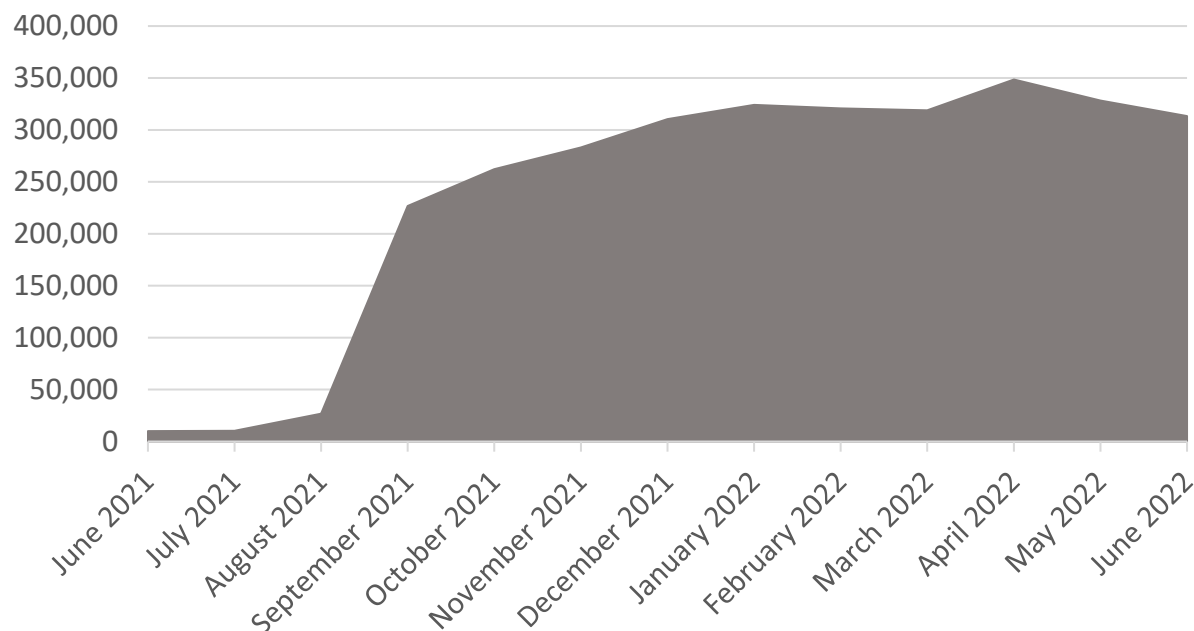
**Source:** Generated by OIG based on analysis of SIV principal applicant data provided by the Under Secretary of State for Management, Office of Management Strategy and Solutions, Center for Analytics.

Of the 9,608 applicants in the visa application phase, 3,695 (38 percent) were eligible to be interviewed. However, because of the suspension of operations at Embassy Kabul in August 2021, applicants had to travel from Afghanistan to another country for their visa interview. Within the Department, the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts stated that she was striving to relocate SIV applicants out of Afghanistan as they became ready for a visa interview.

### **SIV Email Backlog at NVC Creates Additional Delay That Is Unaccounted for in Reported Processing Times**

In addition to the 15,678 applications that were documentarily complete, NVC had initiated cases for an additional 46,210 Afghan SIV applicants as of May 31, 2022. However, those applications were not considered documentarily complete and therefore were not ready for COM review. As previously mentioned, the Afghan SIV process begins with the applicant's initial email being submitted and reviewed by NVC. NVC reported that, leading up to the suspension of operations at Embassy Kabul in August 2021, the applicant email backlog surged by almost 200,000 emails from August 2 to September 1, 2021. From December 1, 2021, through June 1, 2022, NVC's email backlog exceeded 300,000 emails. The monthly email backlog at NVC from June 2021 to June 2022 is depicted in Figure 7.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> In response to a draft of this report, the Department noted that it has continued to make progress to eliminate the backlog and that, as of August 24, 2022, NVC had reduced the email backlog to fewer than 164,000 emails and was on track to eliminate the backlog in its entirety by the end of October 2022.

**Figure 7: Email Backlog From June 1, 2021, to June 1, 2022**

**Source:** Generated by OIG from Afghan SIV email data provided by NVC.

According to an NVC analysis, the email backlog constitutes a mixture of new applications, applicants providing additional information, and general inquiries. Therefore, the number of cases is likely to increase as NVC works through the email backlog. The Department has taken some steps to address the email backlog. For example, on March 8, 2022, NVC implemented a new technology that groups emails by sender to help manage the email backlog. An NVC official said this change allowed NVC to ascertain that the 327,254 emails in the backlog on May 4, 2022, consisted of 147,872 unique contacts. In addition, on April 11, 2022, the Assistant Secretary for CA approved reallocating additional staff to help reduce the email backlog; however, the additional staff were not all expected to be trained and available until November 2022.

NVC's approach to reviewing emails is to review the emails with the oldest date first. During fieldwork at NVC for this review in May 2022, OIG observed that NVC staff were opening emails received on August 26, 2021. Thus, for any of those August 26 emails that were an initial email from an SIV applicant, 8 months had elapsed before NVC began reviewing the application to determine whether it was "documentarily complete" or additional information was needed from the applicant. At the time of OIG's visit, NVC staff were processing SIV applications, including reviewing emails included in the backlog. NVC will continue to receive additional emails from potential SIV applicants through December 31, 2023, at which point, under current law, the Department can no longer accept new Afghan SIV applications.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> 8 U.S.C. § 1101 note, "Afghan Allies Protection," Section 602(b)(3)(F)(ii).

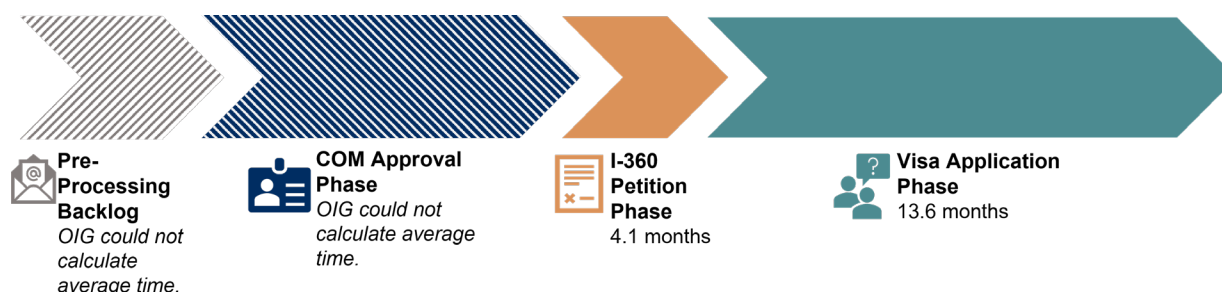


## Overall Average Afghan SIV Processing Time

OIG could not independently calculate the overall SIV processing time from submission of the COM application through visa issuance or denial because of a lack of interoperability between various Department application processing systems and the USCIS I-360 petition processing system. Because of this lack of interoperability, as of December 2021, there was not a single case identifier that tracks an application from start to finish through all the systems to determine an overall processing time. As an alternative approach to determining the overall processing time, OIG sought to calculate average processing times separately for the three phases of the SIV process—COM approval, I-360 petition, and visa application phase—and add them together.

Despite its alternative efforts, OIG could not reliably calculate an overall average processing time for Afghan SIV applications. In addition to the unaccounted time attributable to the pre-processing backlog at NVC, the data necessary to calculate days for the COM approval phase was not reliable. The Department’s quarterly SIV reports include purported COM approval phase processing times, but as previously indicated, OIG has identified deficiencies in the Department’s method for collecting, verifying, and reporting data in the quarterly reports. The only average processing times that OIG could independently calculate were for the I-360 petition phase and the visa application phase, which were 4.1 months and 13.6 months, respectively, from 2009 through 2021, as shown in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Overall Average Processing Time in Months From 2009 Through 2021**



**Source:** Generated by OIG based on analysis of principal applicant data provided by CA and USCIS.

## Chief of Mission Approval Phase Processing Time

OIG planned to report COM processing time by determining the amount of time the COM application took to be processed from the time the application was documentarily complete through the time the application received an agenda date. An “agenda date” represents the date that the ASIV Unit makes an eligibility recommendation. Then, the COM or their designee makes the approval or non-approval decision, and NVC provides notification of the decision to the applicant. However, OIG was unable to determine average COM processing time because of anomalies found in the Department’s COM phase data. Specifically, OIG found that the

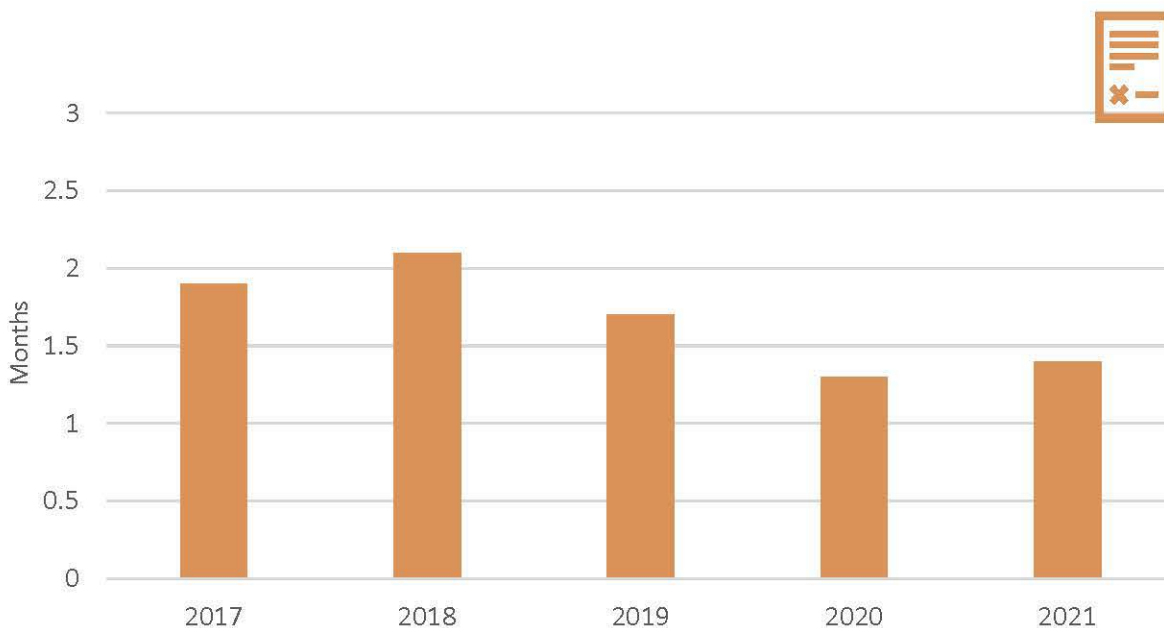


Department's COM approval phase data was illogical or contradictory.<sup>36</sup> For example, OIG found that 36 percent of the Department's COM approval phase data<sup>37</sup> either contained invalid entries for the agenda date or included dates that were chronologically out of sequence. Department officials told OIG that the COM and visa systems were not intended to track processing times when they were originally implemented. As a result, OIG is not presenting information on average processing time of SIV applications at the COM approval phase in this report. OIG's data reliability assessment is in Appendix A.

### I-360 Petition Phase Processing Time

Applicants who are determined to be COM eligible are instructed to submit an I-360 petition to USCIS. OIG found that USCIS processing time of I-360 petitions averaged 4.1 months from 2009 through 2021. From 2017 through 2021, processing time averaged 1.7 months and ranged from a high of 2.2 months in 2018 to a low of 1.3 months in 2020. During 2021, USCIS average processing time of I-360 petitions was 1.4 months. Figure 9 shows the average I-360 petition phase processing time from 2017 through 2021. Additional details are in Appendix D, Table D.2.

**Figure 9: Average Processing Time in Months for I-360 Petition Phase: 2017 – 2021**



**Source:** Generated by OIG based on an analysis of principal applicant data provided by USCIS.

### Visa Application Phase Processing Time

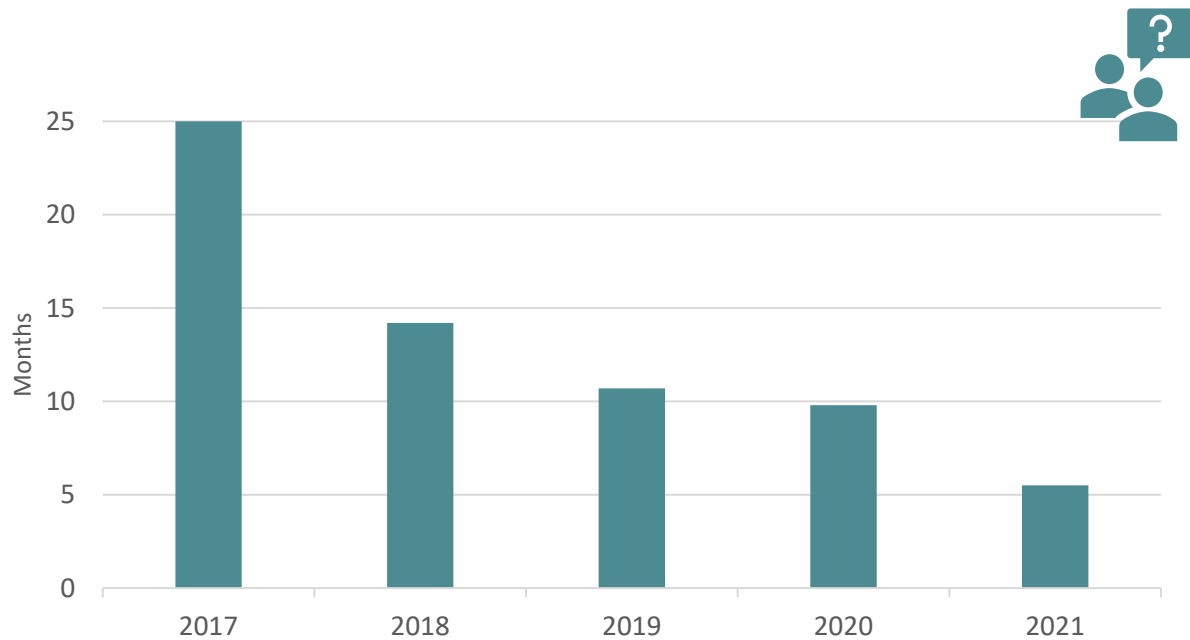
Average processing time for the visa application phase was 13.6 months. From 2017 through 2021, visa application processing time averaged 12.9 months and declined during that period.

<sup>36</sup> AUD-MERO-23-01 contains additional information regarding the COM phase data anomalies.

<sup>37</sup> OIG is not reporting on the processing time for the remaining 64 percent of data because it does not constitute a representative sample of COM approval cases.

In 2017, the visa application phase average processing time was 24.6 months and steadily declined to 5.5 months in 2021. Figure 10 shows the average visa application phase processing time from 2017 through 2021. Additional details are in Appendix D, Table D.2.

**Figure 10: Average Processing Time in Months for Visa Application Phase: 2017–2021**



**Source:** Generated by OIG based on an analysis of principal applicant data provided by CA.

## APPENDIX A: PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

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The Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted this review regarding the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program to respond to requests on the subject from the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Senate Committees on Foreign Relations; the Armed Services; and Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.<sup>1</sup> This report is part of a series of reports OIG is preparing in response to the requests. This information report responds to specific congressional questions involving the Afghan SIV process and related data including the following: (1) a description of the Afghan SIV process and number of days allotted to complete each step; (2) the number of SIV applications<sup>2</sup> received, approved, and denied annually since enactment of the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 through calendar year 2021; (3) the number of SIV applications approved from April 2021 through August 2021; (4) the number and status of SIV applicants in each phase of the SIV process as of May 31, 2022; and (5) the average time taken to process an SIV application from submission to issuance or denial.

This review relates to Overseas Contingency Operations Enduring Sentinel and Freedom's Sentinel and is being conducted in accordance with OIG's oversight responsibilities described in Section 8L of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended. OIG conducted its work from November 2021 to June 2022 in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area; Portsmouth, NH; and Doha, Qatar. OIG faced challenges in completing this work because of the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges included limitations on international travel and in-person meetings, difficulty accessing information, and related difficulties within the Department of State (Department) that affected the Department's ability to respond to OIG requests for information in a timely manner. OIG conducted this review in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*. These standards require that OIG plan and perform the evaluation to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for the findings and conclusions based on the evaluation objective. OIG believes the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for the information presented in this report.

To perform this review, OIG's Office of Audits reviewed applicable laws and Department requirements established in the Foreign Affairs Manual. OIG also interviewed officials from the Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA); the Afghan SIV (ASIV) Unit, located within the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs Joint Executive Office; the Department's Center for Analytics within the Office of the Under Secretary of State for Management; the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts; and the Afghanistan Affairs Unit. OIG obtained and analyzed data from these bureaus on the number of SIV applications received, approved, and denied annually from the program's inception in 2009 through 2021 and key dates for individual SIV applications in the application process to calculate processing

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<sup>1</sup> The congressional request letters are reprinted in Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup> The individual who fulfills the qualifications for the SIV program is the "principal applicant." A principal applicant may be accompanied by a spouse and children, referred to as "derivative applicants." All data presented in this information report represent principal applicants only and do not include derivative applicants.

time for those applications. OIG also obtained weekly reporting on the number of SIV applicants still in the visa process. Because the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) also has a role in the SIV program, OIG interviewed officials from USCIS and obtained data on the petitions it processed in support of the program. OIG coordinated its work with Offices of Inspectors General for other Departments conducting reviews involving various aspects of U.S. government activities in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan through participation in the OIG Afghanistan project coordination working group.

## **Data Reliability**

OIG used computer-processed data as the basis for the information presented in this report. Specifically, OIG obtained application data from CA, the Department's Center for Analytics within the Office of the Under Secretary of State for Management, and USCIS. These data included the number of Afghan SIV applications received and denied, the number of visas issued, and the number of applications remaining for adjudication. OIG identified four systems within the Department that were being used to process SIV applications: the SQ-SIV application,<sup>3</sup> the SIV Manager (SIVM), the Immigrant Visa Information System (IVIS), and the Immigrant Visa Overseas system (IVO). SQ-SIV, IVIS, and IVO are consular systems operated and maintained by CA's Office of Consular Systems and Technology. SIV Manager is a separate system maintained by the ASIV Unit. In addition, USCIS uses an information system called CLAIMS 3, the Computer Linked Application Information Management System. OIG observed SIV application creation; interviewed relevant officials on how applications are processed; and reviewed standard operating procedures, quality control plans, and applicable documents. In addition, OIG tested the data provided for internal consistency by comparing data sets provided from multiple systems. Examples of the results of OIG's testing are as follows:

- OIG totaled the number of individual SIV application identifiers received and found that they matched the total of 59,977 applications. OIG also compared the data provided by CA on COM applications received with NVC's contractor reporting. NVC's contractor is contractually required to report on applications received in support of its invoicing and provide the report to NVC. The contractor reported 60,025 applications received, a difference of 48, or less than a one-percent difference from the CA-provided data of 59,977 Afghan SIV applications.
- OIG cross-checked the CA-provided data on the dates of all cases that started the visa application phase and the subsequent adjudication date denoting that a decision had been made on whether to issue a visa. There were 21,997 cases. OIG compared this number with the aggregate data on visa issuances previously provided by CA and found the results to be almost identical. Specifically, 22,085 cases were in the aggregate data, a difference of 88 cases (less than one percent) from the data, including visa interview case creation and adjudication date.

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<sup>3</sup> SQ is the visa category code for this type of SIV.

- As described in this report, there are three phases in the SIV process. An application must be approved at each phase before it can move to the next phase. Therefore, the approval date for each phase must be earlier than the approval date for the next phase. OIG reviewed and determined that approval dates of applications in each phase preceded the approval dates in subsequent phases except for some dates in the COM review phase as discussed in the sections that follow.

As noted in the Results section of this report, OIG was unable to calculate total SIV processing time for all three phases of the application process because one-third of the Department-provided data needed to calculate processing time for the COM approval phase was not sufficiently reliable. To calculate COM processing time, OIG needed two dates for each application: (1) the date that the application became documentarily complete and (2) the subsequent date communicating the COM decision to the SIV applicant, referred to as the agenda date. However, OIG found three types of anomalies within 22,636 of the 62,978 applications (36 percent) that had a COM decision in the data CA provided OIG.<sup>4</sup> First, all 11,138 applications with a COM decision before 2014 had no entry for an agenda date; rather, the system entered the word "NULL." Second, 3,752 applications with a COM decision between 2014 and 2021 had no entry for an agenda date; rather, the system entered the word "NULL." Third, 7,746 applications contained agenda dates that were out of sequence because an application must be documentarily complete before it is sent for COM review. CA and ASIV Unit officials provided varying explanations as to why documentarily complete dates and agenda dates were chronologically out of order as well as why the fields for some agenda dates were marked "NULL." None of the participants could provide an authoritative answer but instead offered varying explanations based on their understanding of the data systems. As a result of the anomalies in the data and the Department's lack of sufficient explanations as to the differences in the dates, OIG concluded that the Department's data needed to calculate COM application processing time were not sufficiently reliable. Therefore, OIG did not present information on the processing time in this report.

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<sup>4</sup> OIG is not reporting on the processing time for the remaining 64 percent of data because it does not constitute a representative sample of COM approval cases.

## APPENDIX B: CONGRESSIONAL REQUEST LETTERS

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**AMI BERA, M.D.**  
7<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS:  
SUBCOMMITTEES:  
CHAIRMAN, ASIA, THE PACIFIC, CENTRAL ASIA,  
AND NONPROLIFERATION  
AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, AND GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND  
TECHNOLOGY:  
SUBCOMMITTEES:  
SPACE  
INVESTIGATIONS AND OVERSIGHT



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

September 30, 2021

WASHINGTON OFFICE  
172 CANNON HOUSE  
OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
PHONE: (202) 225-5716  
FAX: (202) 226-1298

DISTRICT OFFICE  
8950 CAL. CENTER DRIVE  
BUILDING 3, SUITE 100  
SACRAMENTO, CA 95826  
PHONE: (916) 635-0505  
FAX: (916) 635-0514

[HTTPS://BERA.HOUSE.GOV](https://bera.house.gov)  
[AMI.BERA@MAIL.HOUSE.GOV](mailto:AMI.BERA@MAIL.HOUSE.GOV)

Diana Shaw  
Acting Inspector General  
U.S. Department of State  
Office of Inspector General  
SA-39, 1700 North Moore Street  
Arlington, VA 22209

Sean O'Donnell  
Acting Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Defense  
Office of Inspector General  
4800 Mark Center Drive  
Alexandria, VA 22350

Thomas J. Ullom  
Acting Inspector General  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
Office of Inspector General  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20523

John F. Sopko  
Special Inspector General  
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction  
2530 Crystal Drive  
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Acting Inspector General Shaw, Acting Inspector General O'Donnell, Acting Inspector General Ullom, and Special Inspector General Sopko,

I request the U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General (State OIG), U.S. Department of Defense Office of Inspector General (DOD OIG), U.S. Agency for International Development Office of Inspector General (USAID OIG), and Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) conduct a comprehensive joint audit of the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) process in Afghanistan.



The Afghan SIV program was enacted through the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 to provide a lifesaving path to resettlement for Afghan nationals who have assisted U.S. military and government officials. Although the law requires SIV applications to be processed within nine months, the program has been plagued by backlogs leading to processing times that can last over three years. These delays put our Afghan allies at an increased risk of facing violent retribution by the Taliban.

As Congress conducts oversight on U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, it is critical that we examine the execution of the SIV program, and ways in which the program can be streamlined. Therefore, I am interested in the IG community's past and future oversight of the SIV program to identify where the United States succeeded, fell short, and must improve to protect our allies.

The IG community should thoroughly examine individual department and interagency processes and practices pertaining to the Afghan SIV process. I request all responses be provided in an unclassified form, to the extent possible, with a classified annex where necessary. At a minimum, the review should include:

- 1) the numbers of SIV applications received, approved, and denied, by year, since enactment of The Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009;
- 2) the average time taken to process an application from the date of submission until final disposition;
- 3) the degree to which the Department of State implemented recommendations made by the Department of State Office of Inspector General in its June 2020 reports on Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program (AUD-MERO-20-35) and Management Assistance Report: Quarterly Reporting on Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program Needs Improvement (AUD-MERO-20-34);
  - a) the success implementation of report recommendations had in addressing barriers in the SIV program;
- 4) what changes, if any, the Department of State made in vetting SIV applicants since the establishment of Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation (SRAR) in 2018;
- 5) the extent to which the Department of State adjusted practices and procedures to vet applicants at any point following the February 2020 Doha Agreement with the Taliban;
- 6) the impact of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) on the Afghan SIV process, if any, and adjustments the Department of State made to account for COVID-19 impacts;
- 7) to the extent practicable, the current location and status of all SIV applicants; where not possible, a description of the approximate number of applicants;
- 8) the resettlement outcomes for SIV recipients as compared to U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP);
  - a) factors to be examined should include location of resettlement, school enrollment, employment status, and housing placement during the Reception and Placement (R&P) program, as well as the number of recipients who become naturalized U.S. citizens;
- 9) recommendations to strengthen and streamline the SIV process;

- 10) the lessons learned on best practices for SIV programs in countries with ongoing U.S. military involvement; and
- 11) any additional points of interest deemed necessary by the IG community.

I request that all agencies utilize existing audits while compiling the report to avoid duplicative efforts. Thank you for your attention to this important matter and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ami Bera".

Ami Bera, M.D.  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific,  
Central Asia, and Nonproliferation



**United States Senate**  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 21, 2021

The Honorable Diana Shaw  
Acting Inspector General  
U.S. Department of State  
Office of Inspector General  
SA-39, 1700 North Moore Street Arlington, VA 22209

The Honorable Sean O'Donnell  
Acting Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Defense  
Office of Inspector General  
4800 Mark Center Drive Alexandria, VA 22350

The Honorable Joseph Cuffari  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Office of Inspector General  
3801 Nebraska Ave N.W., Washington, DC 20016

The Honorable Thomas Ullom  
Acting Inspector General  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
Office of Inspector General  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W. Washington, DC 20523

Dear Ms. Shaw, Mr. O'Donnell, Mr. Cuffari, and Mr. Ullom:

We write to request the U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, and the U.S. Agency for International Development Office of Inspector General launch a comprehensive joint review and audit of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program. While we appreciate the U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General's commitment to carry out a review of the SIV program, we feel any audit must be comprehensive in scope and consider the role of other key agencies, notably the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Defense.

For the past 20 years, the U.S. mission in Afghanistan has relied heavily on brave Afghans who put their lives on the line and knowingly risked Taliban retribution to serve our soldiers and diplomats. Without their support, our mission would not have been possible. Now, in the aftermath of the chaotic and haphazard U.S. withdrawal, in which thousands of SIV applicants were

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The Honorable Joseph Cuffari  
The Honorable Thomas Ullom  
October 21, 2021  
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shamefully left behind, these same Afghans are at grave risk, vulnerable to retaliation from the Taliban due to their association with the United States.

Under the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, the SIV program was expanded to grant Afghan interpreters, translators, and others access to U.S. visas in cases of imminent risk. In an effort to safeguard the security of our partners on the ground, the law mandates a maximum nine-month processing window for each principal applicant. However, the Afghan SIV program, much like its Iraqi counterpart, has long been plagued by lengthy processing delays. It is estimated that the resource intensive 14-step, inter-agency, process takes an average three and half years to complete, resulting in a backlog of well over 20,000 principle applicants before the U.S. military withdrawal on August 31, 2021. Since then, the number of credible threats against our partners and their families in Afghanistan continues to increase by the day, as the Taliban continues to solidify its violent grip over the country.

The United States pledged to support those who served our mission in Afghanistan. This is vital if we are to uphold our commitment to those who helped defend core U.S. national security interests. Failing to do so would lead allies and adversaries alike to call into question our reliability and credibility as a partner in future conflicts.

This investigation should thoroughly review each individual executive department that holds responsibilities in the SIV process, as well as their respective bureaus, offices, and missions, and the interagency processes in place to help facilitate communication and coordination between them. We request all responses be provided in an unclassified form, to the extent possible, with a classified annex where necessary. At a minimum, the review should include:

- 1) A detailed step-by-step description of the SIV process together with the number of days allotted by the U.S. government for the completion of each step;
- 2) The numbers of SIV applications received, approved, and denied, by year, since enactment of the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009;
- 3) The specific number of applications approved between April 2021 and August 2021;
- 4) An assessment of the average length of time required to process an SIV application from the date of submission to final disposition;
- 5) An accounting of how many SIV applicants remain in the pipeline;

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6) The extent to each participating department or agency of the U.S. government, including the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security, adjusted SIV processing practices and procedures to vet applicants and expand processing capacity since the February 29, 2020, Doha Agreement between the United States and the Taliban;

7) A list of the specific steps, if any, taken between January 20, 2021 and August 31, 2021, to streamline Afghan SIV applicant processing and address longstanding bureaucratic hurdles, while improving security protocols;

8) An assessment of the continuing viability of the current SIV process in light of the recent Taliban takeover;

9) Recommendations to strengthen and streamline the SIV process going forward, in light of the Taliban takeover, particularly with respect to the timeline for granting Chief of Mission approval;

10) Factors under consideration with respect to efforts to relocate processing capabilities away from Kabul, including obstacles, barriers, and limitations to doing so;

11) The degree to which the Department of State implemented recommendations made by the Department of State Office of Inspector General in its June 2020 reports on Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program (AUD-MERO-20-35) and Management Assistance Report: Quarterly Reporting on Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program Needs Improvement (AUD-MERO-20-34);

12) An assessment of the extent to which challenges in verifying applicants' employment with the Department of Defense contributed to delays in the SIV process, and an accounting of the specific steps taken since February 29, 2020 to address issues surrounding employment verification;

13) An assessment of efforts to develop contingency plans for the safe evacuation of SIV holders from Afghanistan to the United States before August 31, 2021, and an accounting of the number of SIV holders remaining in Afghanistan after August 31, 2021;

14) The resettlement outcomes for SIV recipients as compared to like outcomes for participants in the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Among the outcomes to be assessed are: location of resettlement, school enrollment, employment status, and housing placement during the Reception and Placement phases of each program, as well as the number of participants who became naturalized U.S. citizens;

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15) The lessons learned from the Afghan SIV program that could be applied to enhance SIV programs in other countries with ongoing U.S. military involvement; and

16) Any additional matters deemed appropriate by the participating Inspectors General.

As you carry out your investigation, we request that you draw on past audits, investigations, assessments, and other relevant oversight documents from across the inter-agency to inform the direction of your work. I request that the completed report of your review and audit be provided to the Ranking Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senate Armed Services Committee, and Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee in an unclassified form, to the extent possible, with a classified annex as necessary.

Sincerely,



JAMES E. RISCH  
Ranking Member  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



JAMES M. INHOFE  
Ranking Member  
Senate Armed Services Committee

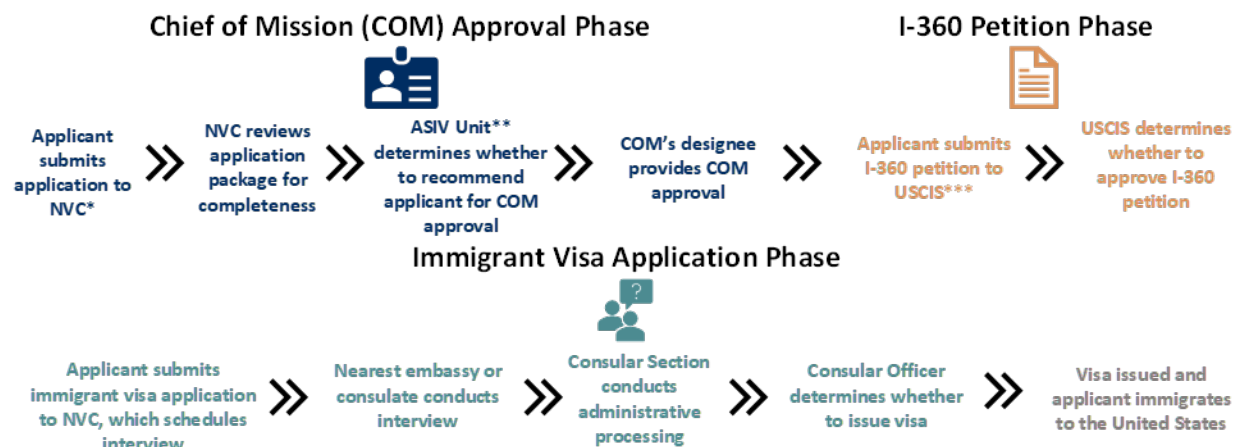


ROB PORTMAN  
Ranking Member  
Senate Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs Committee



## APPENDIX C: AFGHAN SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA APPLICATION PROCESS AS OF JUNE 2022

**Figure C.1: Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Application Process**



\*National Visa Center (NVC)

\*\*Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Unit (ASIV Unit)

\*\*\*Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

**Note:** In response to a draft of this report (see Appendix E), the Department asked that OIG provide the following clarification to avoid confusion among special immigrant visa applicants: “since the suspension of operations at Embassy Kabul – NVC does not automatically proceed with scheduling the interview until the applicant informs NVC to which processing post the applicant is able to travel and appear for [an] interview.”

**Source:** Generated by the Office of Inspector General based on information obtained from congressional legislation including the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, as amended, authorizing the Afghan SIV program and from information obtained from interviews with Department of State (Department) and USCIS officials and information on the Department flow charts depicting the SIV review process.

## APPENDIX D: AFGHAN SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA APPLICATION DATA

**Table D.1: Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Applications Received, Approved, and Denied: 2009–2021**

Calendar Year	Applications Received	Applications Approved*	Applications Denied At All Stages
2009	0	128	2
2010	1	8	10
2011	1,226	0	141
2012	4,376	132	287
2013	4,066	938	3,642
2014	3,495	3,656	2,084
2015	7,823	3,048	3,765
2016	6,552	3,136	4,568
2017	5,581	3,975	3,732
2018	8,350	1,294	1,339
2019	5,116	2,748	2,410
2020	3,662	963	2,242
2021	9,729	2,059	4,599
<b>Totals</b>	<b>59,977</b>	<b>22,085</b>	<b>28,821</b>

\*Visa issuance data include Afghan nationals petitioning for special immigrant status under a separate program for persons serving as translators, authorized by the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2006, codified at 8 United States Code § 1101 note. Only 50 visas per year can be issued to applicants under this authority. However, the Department of State (Department) may provide approved petitioners with visas under another authority, per the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2008, if those 50 visas have been issued and the subsequent authority's numerical limitations have not been met. (8 United States Code § 1101 note "Special Immigrant Status for Persons Serving as Translators With United States Armed Forces.") Additionally, the Department did not track SIV application data prior to December 2010.

**Source:** Generated by the Office of Inspector General based on an analysis of data provided by the Bureau of Consular Affairs and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and pertaining only to principal applicants (i.e., Afghan nationals who may be eligible to receive an SIV).

**Table D.2: Processing Time in Months by SIV Application Phase**

Year	Chief of Mission Approval Phase*	I-360 Petition Phase**	Visa Application Phase
2009	<i>data not sufficiently reliable</i>	1.3	-
2010	<i>data not sufficiently reliable</i>	1.5	-
2011	<i>data not sufficiently reliable</i>	0.5	17.2
2012	<i>data not sufficiently reliable</i>	2.0	20.7
2013	<i>data not sufficiently reliable</i>	7.0	16.6
2014	<i>data not sufficiently reliable</i>	13.7	18.8
2015	<i>data not sufficiently reliable</i>	1.2	14.0
2016	<i>data not sufficiently reliable</i>	3.1	17.8
2017	<i>data not sufficiently reliable</i>	1.9	24.6
2018	<i>data not sufficiently reliable</i>	2.2	14.0
2019	<i>data not sufficiently reliable</i>	1.7	10.6
2020	<i>data not sufficiently reliable</i>	1.3	9.7
2021	<i>data not sufficiently reliable</i>	1.4	5.5

\*OIG was unable to calculate processing time for the Chief of Mission approval phase because the data were not sufficiently reliable. See the Data Reliability section in Appendix A of this report for additional details.

\*\* I-360 petition data include Afghan nationals petitioning for special immigrant status under a separate program for persons serving as translators, authorized by the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2006, codified at 8 United States Code § 1101 note. Afghan nationals under this authority represent a negligible portion of the data because the program applies to a narrow category of Afghan translators and the program is only allotted 50 visas per year. However, the Department may provide approved petitioners with visas under another authority, per the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2008, if those 50 visas have been issued and the subsequent authority's numerical limitations have not been met. (8 United States Code § 1101 note "Special Immigrant Status for Persons Serving as Translators With United States Armed Forces.")

**Source:** Generated by OIG based on an analysis of data provided by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services on I-360 petitions and the Bureau of Consular Affairs on visa applications.

## APPENDIX E: DEPARTMENT OF STATE RESPONSE

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United States Department of State

*Deputy Secretary of State  
for Management and Resources*

*Washington, D.C. 20520*

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August 30, 2022

### MEMORANDUM

TO: OIG – Diana Shaw, Acting

FROM: D-MR – Brian P. McKeon *Bm*

SUBJECT: Response to the Draft Information Report: Afghan  
Special Immigrant Visa Program Metrics

(U) Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Office of the Inspector General's draft report Information Report: Afghanistan Special Immigrant Visa Program Metrics.

(U) After our thorough review of the report, we ask that the OIG make the following factual updates and redact the information in Tab 1:

**Comment 1:** The OIG's *Draft Report* analyzes the Afghan SIV program through June 2022 but does not capture the SIV program improvements enacted since. In July 2022, the Department of State (State) and United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), introduced a revised SIV petition process which aims to reduce SIV processing time and make the application process less burdensome on the applicant. Therefore, information included in the *Draft Report* referencing the required submission of a I-360 petition to USCIS is not accurate for all (or even most) applicants. To avoid confusion among SIV applicants and stakeholders, and improve the accuracy and relevance of the report, the OIG's *Draft Report* should make clear up front the period of review and the fact that the process

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described in response to question (1) is no longer current. As of now, the only mention of this significant process change is in a footnote (see FN 20).

**Comment 2:** The OIG's *Draft Report* concluded that from 2009 to 2021 there were 9,071 SIV applications submitted that had been neither approved and issued an SIV nor denied an SIV and remain under State's continued review of their merits. (*Draft Report* 2, 3 and 9). The report also asserts "the combined average processing time of 17.7 months for just the last two processing phases [I-360 and visa processing] is nearly twice the 9-month statutory goal for the entire process". The OIG conclusion that the 9,071 SIV applications that have been neither approved nor denied continue to be "under review" by the Department is not explained. The OIG conclusion does not appear to account for the fact applications may be pending at the COM or visa application stages for reasons outside the Department's control, including non-responsiveness from employers or supervisors in relation to efforts by the ASIV Unit to verify employment eligibility and letters of recommendation included in COM applications. The OIG conclusion also did not account for, following the suspension of operations at Embassy Kabul, the need for applicants to travel outside Afghanistan in order to appear for visa interview. Similarly, the calculation of a combined average processing time of 17.7 months does not account for cases that are pending with the applicant for further action. Cases that are pending with an applicant require applicant action before the case can be reviewed by State, and short of manual review of each case, it is impossible to determine whether a given case is pending action with the applicant or the Department. To clarify these conclusions, the report should make clear the 9,071 figure assumes all pending applications are pending actions under the Department's control and that the 17.7 month combined average processing time does not account for the amount of time cases are pending applicant or third-party action, as opposed to Government action.

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**Comment 3:** The OIG's *Draft Report* states on p. 1-2 of the Summary of the Review that the AAPA states the Department and DHS should complete the entire SIV process within nine months of receiving a complete application. This is inaccurate. Importantly, and related to Comment 2 above, the AAPA provides that all steps *under the control of the respective departments* should be completed not later than nine months after receiving a complete application. In calculating average processing times and monitoring the agencies' performance, Congress made explicit the only efficiency improvements the agencies can make are to the time periods required to complete actions under their control. Moreover, neither in the summary nor on p. 7 in quoting the nine-month benchmark does the *Draft Report* include reference to the crucial "Construction" provision (B) related to high-risk cases which provides that "Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit the ability of a Secretary referred to in subparagraph (A) to take longer than 9 months to complete those steps incidental to the issuance of such visas in high-risk cases for which satisfaction of national security concerns requires additional time." For completeness, these references to the nine-month statutory benchmark in the AAPA should include the key language "under the control of the respective departments" and the notwithstanding provision for high-risk cases.

**Comment 4:** Decisions on COM applications, both approvals and non-approvals, are made, in accordance with the AAPA, by the COM or his or her designee. They are not made by the ASIV Unit nor NVC. At the top of p. 5, the *Draft Report* states "if the ASIV Unit recommends an application for denial" that NVC notifies the applicant and explains the reasons for the denial. This is inaccurate. If and when the COM or his or her designee denies a COM application, NVC's role is administrative only. The ASIV Unit uploads to NVC a COM non-approval letter reflecting the decision made by the COM and/or his or her designee, including the reasons for the COM's decision. NVC in turn transmits this letter to the applicant. The inaccurate sentence on p. 5 should be corrected.

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**Comment 5:** The *Draft Report* inaccurately states on p.6 in describing the visa application phase that once documentarily completed, NVC schedules the applicant for interview at the IV processing post “nearest to the applicant.” This is inaccurate and is likely to generate confusion among applicants, as – since the suspension of operations at Embassy Kabul – NVC does not automatically proceed with scheduling the interview until the applicant informs NVC to which IV processing post the applicant is able to travel and appear for interview. (See Important Notice: Transferring SIV Cases from Embassy Kabul to Another Post at [travel.state.gov/afghan](https://travel.state.gov/afghan) “Operations at U.S. Embassy Kabul have been suspended since August 31, 2021. We are unable to provide visa services, including visa interviews, in Afghanistan at this time. Applicants with an approved I-360 petition, who are ready to schedule their SIV interview at a U.S. embassy or consulate outside Afghanistan, should reach out to NVC NVCSIV@state.gov to have their case transferred.”)

**Comment 6:** Page 14 of the *Draft Report* inaccurately states that “An agenda date represents the date ASIV decides whether an SIV applicant meets COM eligibility criteria and completes its review of the COM application.” As underscored above, the ASIV unit prepares the agenda for the COM or his or her designee, but the COM or his or her designee makes the ultimate decision on whether the applicant meets the eligibility criteria. The agenda date represents the date the ASIV Unit makes its approval or non-approval recommendation to the COM or his or her designee. This date is now identical to the date that the COM designee in turn makes their approval or non-approval decision. The sentence on p. 14 should be corrected to reflect that the COM or his or her designee, not ASIV, makes the ultimate decision on eligibility.

**Comment 7:** Footnote 15 of the *Draft Report* includes in the itemized list of documents that an applicant must include in order to be documentarily complete a “statement of threats that may have been received as a consequence of employment.” This is not accurate. On

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August 25, 2021, the Deputy Chief of Mission for Afghanistan determined that any noncitizen who was employed in Afghanistan by or on behalf of the U.S. government or by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) or any successor mission, has experienced or is experiencing an ongoing serious threat as a consequence of the alien's employment. As a result, Afghan SIV applicants have not needed to submit a statement to establish that they have experienced an ongoing serious threat as part of their COM application. Footnote 15 should be updated to reflect this change to avoid confusion among SIV applicants.

**Comment 8:** The *Draft Report* concludes that the OIG was unable to determine the average COM processing time because of anomalies found in the Department's COM phase data. The Department understands this conclusion to be with respect to challenges calculating average processing times at the COM phase historically, not a conclusion regarding the accuracy and reliability of COM phase data presently and requests the report be updated to make this clear. Cases that pre-date the formation of the ASIV Unit in 2016 to assist Embassy Kabul with COM processing and the advent of ASIV's case processing system, SIV Manager, or SIVM, would not have an "agenda date," as only in 2017 did the ASIV Unit begin to track cases in SIVM using the "agenda date." Moreover, cases that were denied before the formation of the ASIV Unit and the advent of SIVM but were later appealed and managed using SIVM would have data that appears anomalous. Historically, the congressional quarterly reports have acknowledged challenges in calculating average processing times at the COM phase. However, at least since Q4 of the FY2021, the Department has implemented methodologies to ensure that the calculations of average process times are accurate and complete.

**Comment 9:** The Department notes that the data on visa issuances provided in the OIG report (e.g., in Figure 5) include only principal applicants and not the number of SIVs issued to derivative applicants. For this reason, the OIG reports a lower number of SIVs

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issued in the relevant time periods than the Department's public reporting, which includes both principal and derivative applicant visa issuances. Although it is noted on page 1 that all data presented represents principal applicants only, the report should be updated to make this clear in each instance where visa issuance data is reported. This will help better reflect the overall workload and processing times of consular sections in the visa interview phase that must conduct in-person interviews with both principal applicants and derivatives.

**Comment 10:** The Draft Report describes the exponential surge in emails received by NVC in August-September 2021 and the resulting backlog. However, the scope of the report only includes information on the backlog up to June 1, 2022. Since that time, as a result of new technology and surging NVC staff to SIV processing, the Department has continued to make significant progress to eliminate the backlog. Between August 15, 2021, and August 15, 2022, NVC's Chief of Mission mailbox received more than 866,000 emails. As of August 24, 2022, NVC has reduced the email backlog to under 164,000, and is on track to eliminate the backlog in its entirety by the end of October 2022. The Department requests the report include a footnote with this update on the status of the email backlog.

**Comment 11:** In both the summary on Page 2 and Figure 3 on Page 8, "the number of SIV applications received, approved and denied annually" appears to combine Chief of Mission approvals and non-approvals, I-360 approvals and denials, and special immigrant visa issuances and denials into one overall category. However, the processes and legal basis for decision-making in each of these three stages is different, making it difficult for the reader to understand at what stages the majority of approvals and denials actually occur. If possible, please revise the graphic for Figure 3 to provide a breakdown of the number of COM cases approved versus visas issued (it is not necessarily 1:1); the number of cases under review at COM versus within the visa

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adjudication process; and the number of COM denials versus visa denials.

**Comment 12:** Please note on page 4, footnote 12, "...Ranking Member, Senate Foreign Affairs Committee" should be, "Ranking Member, Senate Foreign **Relations** Committee."

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## APPENDIX F: OIG REPLY TO COMMENTS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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The Department of State (Department) provided general comments in response to a draft of this report (see Appendix E). The paragraphs that follow summarize the comments and the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) reply.

**Comment 1:** The Department noted that the report analyzes the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program through June 2022 but does not capture the SIV program improvements enacted since that time. Specifically, in July 2022, the Department and the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), "introduced a revised SIV petition process" that was only mentioned in a footnote in the draft report. The Department requested that OIG revise the report to clarify "up front" the period of the review and that the process is "no longer current" to avoid confusion about the process among SIV applicants and stakeholders.

**OIG Reply:** As stated in Appendix A, "Purpose, Scope, and Methodology," OIG's fieldwork ended in June 2022, which was the end of the period covered by the report. However, in response to the comment, OIG included additional references to the period covered in the report and to the revised petition process, including in the "Summary of Review" section at the beginning of the report.

**Comment 2:** The Department stated that OIG did not explain why it had concluded that the 9,071 SIV applications that were neither approved nor denied remained "under State's continued review of their merits." The Department further noted that this conclusion did not appear to account for applications pending at the Chief of Mission (COM) or visa application stages for reasons beyond its control. Similarly, the Department stated that the 17.7 months of average processing time reported by OIG did not account for processing time that was outside its control. However, the Department also stated that "short of a manual review of each case, it is impossible to determine whether a given case is pending action with the applicant or the Department." The Department requested that the report clarify that the 9,071 SIV applications and the 17.7 months combined average processing time did not account for actions or amounts of time that were outside of its control.

**OIG Reply:** OIG recognizes that there are factors affecting SIV processing outside the Department's control. Nevertheless, the request OIG received was to identify "the average time taken to process an [SIV] application from the date of submission until final disposition." As discussed in the body of this report, and recognized in the Department's comments, OIG could not independently calculate the overall SIV processing time from submission of the COM application through visa issuance or denial because of data limitations. To address the Department's comment regarding the 17.7-month average processing time for the last two phases of the process, OIG edited the report to include only the average processing times that OIG was able to calculate directly from Department and USCIS data (4.1 months for the I-360 petition phase and 13.6 months for the visa application phase) and deleted reference to the

17.7-month combined processing time. To address the Department's comments regarding OIG's "conclusion" about the 9,071 SIV applications, OIG added language to clarify that the number was based on documentarily complete applications that had been received but were neither approved nor denied and therefore remained "pending." OIG removed the reference to the Department reviewing the "merits" of the 9,071 cases.

**Comment 3:** The Department raised concern that the draft report incompletely cited the Afghan Allies Protection Act because OIG did not (1) specify that "all steps under the control of the respective departments" must be completed in 9 months, and (2) include a reference to the "Construction" provision, which allows for more than 9 months to complete the issuance of "high-risk cases for which satisfaction of national security concerns requires additional time." The Department requested that the preceding information be added to the report.

**OIG Reply:** OIG notes that reference to "all steps under the control of the respective departments" was included in the draft report as well as the final report in the section, "Time Allotted To Complete Processing of SIV Applicants." OIG added the Construction clause to its report for completeness (see footnote 26 in the Results section). In addition, OIG removed language that linked the processing time it had calculated to the time required by the Afghan Allies Protection Act, which was not possible to calculate without a manual review of each individual case (as the Department noted in its comments).

**Comment 4:** The Department requested that OIG clarify language in the report regarding COM approval phase denials and the National Visa Center's (NVC) role as follows: Specifically, that "both approvals and non-approvals, are made . . . by the COM or their designee. . . . NVC's role is administrative only."

**OIG Reply:** OIG acknowledges that there was ambiguity in the draft report language regarding COM approval phase denials and the National Visa Center's (NVC) role. Therefore, OIG revised the language in the final report to clarify the roles and responsibilities related to COM application denials.

**Comment 5:** The Department stated that OIG inaccurately described when and where the visa interview is scheduled, which could cause confusion among SIV applicants. The Department noted changes to the scheduling process since the suspension of operations at Embassy Kabul.

**OIG Reply:** OIG summarized in the draft of this report the changes in process before and after the suspension of operations at Embassy Kabul. However, to help clarify, OIG added a footnote that includes the Department's comment regarding timing and locations for scheduling interviews.

**Comment 6:** Similar to Comment 4, the Department noted that the Afghan SIV (ASIV) Unit prepares the agenda for COM approval but that the COM or their designee makes the ultimate decision. The Department requested that OIG update the report "to reflect that the COM or his or her designee, not ASIV, makes the ultimate decision on eligibility."



**OIG Reply:** OIG concurred with the Department's clarification and updated the final report to clarify that the COM or their designee, not the ASIV Unit, makes decisions on COM applications.

**Comment 7:** The Department stated, "On August 25, 2021, the Deputy Chief of Mission for Afghanistan determined that any noncitizen who was employed in Afghanistan by or on behalf of the U.S. government or by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) or any successor mission, has experienced or is experiencing an ongoing serious threat as a consequence of the alien's employment. As a result, Afghan SIV applicants have not needed to submit a statement to establish that they have experienced an ongoing serious threat as part of their COM application." The Department requested that the report be updated to clarify this point to avoid confusion among SIV applicants.

**OIG Reply:** Upon receipt of the Department's comments, OIG reviewed updated instructions available on the Department's website at [https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/SIVs/Afghan%20SIV%20Guidelines%20and%20DS157%20Instructions\\_July\\_22.pdf](https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/SIVs/Afghan%20SIV%20Guidelines%20and%20DS157%20Instructions_July_22.pdf) and confirmed that the website no longer included the requirement for a statement of threat. Accordingly, OIG added the requested clarification to the final report (see footnote 15 in the Results section).

**Comment 8:** The Department acknowledged that OIG was unable to determine the average COM processing time because of anomalies found in the Department's COM data but explained that anomalies should have been limited to historical data ("[c]ases that pre-date the formation of the ASIV Unit in 2016 . . . and the advent of ASIV's case processing system . . ."). The Department further explained that the "agenda date" needed for the calculation was first used in 2017 by the ASIV system and that cases denied prior to 2017 and later appealed and processed in the system would have anomalous data. The Department noted that its congressional quarterly reporting acknowledged the "challenges in calculating average processing times" but that, at least since the fourth quarter FY 2021, "the Department has implemented methodologies to ensure that the calculations of average process times are accurate and complete."

**OIG Reply:** The details of the anomalies OIG found are described in the Data Reliability Section of Appendix A in this report. In addition, OIG notes that the Department's quarterly SIV reports include purported COM approval phase processing times, but that OIG identified deficiencies in the Department's method for collecting, verifying, and reporting data in the quarterly reports. Specifically, as part of its ongoing series of reports on the Afghan SIV program, OIG conducted a follow-up review of previously identified issues with wait time methodologies and is reporting its findings in a separate report (OIG, *Compliance Follow-Up Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program* [AUD-MERO-23-01, October 2022]).

**Comment 9:** The Department highlighted the fact that the data on visa issuances provided in the OIG report included only principal applicants and not the number of SIVs issued to derivative applicants. "For this reason, the OIG reports a lower number of SIVs issued in the

relevant time periods than the Department's public reporting, which includes both principal and derivative applicant visa issuances.” The Department requested that OIG clarify that in “each instance where visa issuance data is reported,” the data represents principal applicants only.

**OIG Reply:** OIG added additional references to “principal applicant” where appropriate in figures throughout the report.

**Comment 10:** The Department noted that the draft report describes the exponential surge in emails received by NVC in August–September 2021 and the resulting backlog but that the report only includes updated information on the backlog until June 1, 2022. According to the Department, it has continued to make significant progress to eliminate the backlog and, as of August 24, 2022, NVC had reduced the email backlog to fewer than 164,000 emails and was on track to eliminate the backlog by the end of October 2022. The Department requested that OIG include a footnote with the updated status of the email backlog.

**OIG Reply:** Because OIG’s fieldwork ended in June 2022, OIG was limited in what it could accurately and appropriately represent in the report. However, in response to the Department’s comment, OIG added a footnote to provide the updated status of the backlog as of August 24, 2022, as requested.

**Comment 11:** The Department requested that OIG revise the graphic (Figure 3) that shows “the number of SIV applications received, approved, and denied” to show approvals and denials broken down by the stage in which they occurred, if possible.

**OIG Reply:** OIG provided this graphic as a simple, high-level summary of SIV application dispositions. OIG recognizes that the SIV application process is complicated but believes that the data as presented in Figure 3 of the final report are accurate and responsive to the congressional request OIG received.

**Comment 12:** The Department noted a typographical error in footnote 12 of the draft report.

**OIG Reply:** OIG corrected the typographical error.

## ABBREVIATIONS

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ASIV	Afghan Special Immigrant Visa
CA	Bureau of Consular Affairs
COM	Chief of Mission
IVIS	Immigrant Visa Information System
IVO	Immigrant Visa Overseas
NVC	National Visa Center
OIG	Office of Inspector General
SIV	Special Immigrant Visa
U.S.C.	United States Code
USCIS	Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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