

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

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

How many Afghan SIVs have been issued in the Third Quarter of FY 2021 (April 1, 2021, to June 30, 2021)?

Afghan Principal Applicants Issued	Afghan Derivative Applicants Issued	Total Afghan SIVs Issued in FY 2021 (through June 30, 2021)	Total Afghan Numbers Used ¹	Remaining SIVs for Afghan applicants
615	1,975	4,591	16,319	10,181

What efficiency improvements have been made to Afghan SIV processing?

Chief of Mission (COM) staff acquired one additional temporary duty (TDY) personnel, added ten contract personnel (two permanent and eight temporary), and received 18 personnel with short-term assignments to the COM Unit this reporting period. After training and onboarding, the Department of State anticipates being able to report on the impact of the increased staffing levels in Q4 FY 2021.

Embassy Kabul had additional consular officer staffing to work exclusively on SIV processing from April 1, 2021, through the end of the reporting period. The additional staffing allowed Embassy Kabul to significantly increase daily interview and issuance capacity. This additional capacity allowed the National Visa Center (NVC) to forward to Kabul the backlog of over 2,000 cases that built up while the consular section was closed from March 2020 to February 2021.

COM staff collaborated with the U.S. Digital Service (USDS) to develop technological tools to improve the efficiency and workflow of the COM-approval process.

The NVC cross-trained an additional 57 personnel in SIV processing in order to manage an anticipated increase in demand.

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

All steps in the Afghan SIV application process are outlined below and include the current average processing time for all involved U.S. government entities. This statistic captures total

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

U.S. government processing time in calendar days, beginning when the applicant first expresses interest in the program to State's NVC and ending with the date of visa issuance at a U.S. embassy or consulate.² It does not capture those steps in the SIV process that depend solely on the applicant's initiative and are outside the control of the U.S. government.

Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Processing Steps ³				
Stage	Step	Description	Average processing time in calendar days	Number of Cases Processed
Chief of Mission (COM) application process	1	Applicant submits COM application package to State's NVC. ⁴	Applicant-controlled	N/A
	2	NVC reviews documents for completeness.	28	12,650 ⁵
	3	NVC sends completed application package to the COM Committee at Embassy Kabul.	1	1,272
	4	The COM Committee reviews the application and makes a decision to approve or deny.	554 ⁶	1,837
	5	The COM Committee advises NVC if the application is approved. If approved, NVC immediately sends approval letter to applicant. (If any documents reveal that applicant does not qualify for the program, the COM application is denied.)	5	1,745
Form I-360 adjudication process	6	Applicant self-petitions to DHS U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) using form I-360.	Applicant-controlled	N/A

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

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

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

⁵ This number reflects the number of case reviews conducted by the NVC within the quarter. The NVC counts a review each time an SIV applicant submits additional documents to complete their case. This number may be larger than the total number of cases pending at the NVC because an individual case might be reviewed multiple times in a single quarter.

⁶ Totals include data for SIV applicants who completed Chief of Mission Committee review between April 1, 2021, and June 30, 2021. The congressionally mandated prioritization plan requires high priority tiers to be processed first, the constant intake of high priority tiers has meant that low priority tiers wait longer for review and analysis, which contributed to this averaged processing time. The addition of new staff in Q3 temporarily shifted attention from processing to training and onboarding.

	7	USCIS adjudicates petition and sends to NVC if approved. ⁷	20	1,430
Visa interview process, including pre- and post-interview ⁸	8	NVC sends instruction packet to applicant requesting standard immigrant visa documentation, including DS-260 immigrant visa application.	8	1,524
	9	Applicant submits required documentation to NVC.	Applicant-controlled	N/A
	10	NVC reviews documents for completeness, corresponding with applicant when additional documentation is needed.	14	565 ⁹
	11	When the immigrant visa application is complete, NVC schedules applicant for next available interview at the U.S. embassy's consular section.	N/A	2,139
	12	Applicant is interviewed and biometrics are collected by consular officer on the scheduled appointment date. Administrative processing is initiated following the interview. ¹⁰	N/A	1,730 ¹¹
	13	The applicant's case undergoes administrative processing. ¹²	35	2,386
Visa issuance to eligible applicants	14	Upon completion of administrative processing, applicant is instructed to obtain a medical exam. Once the medical exam is completed, the visa is issued if applicant is eligible. In some cases, the passport will have expired and requires renewal by the applicant.	Applicant-controlled	615
		Total U.S. government processing time in calendar days¹³	665	N/A

⁷ For I-360 petitions filed with USCIS between April 1, 2021, and June 30, 2021.

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

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

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

¹¹ Line 12 reflects the number of cases interviewed at the U.S. Embassy Kabul only. There may have been additional SQ-SIV interviews at U.S. embassies or consulates around the world, but the Department of State does not track those numbers.

¹² Line 13 totals include data for SIV applicants who completed administrative processing between April 1, 2021, and June 30, 2021. Average processing time for cases that remain pending cannot be calculated until they are completed. A high number in this field reflects older cases being completed, not older cases languishing.

¹³ The statistics in this chart were formerly reported in business days in reports published April 2014 – April 2016. U.S. government processing times do not factor in applicant-controlled steps. Overall processing times are greater than U.S. government processing times.

Why are applications pending longer than nine months in U.S. government-controlled stages of the SIV application?

Certain applications may be pending longer than nine months for completion of COM review (Step 4). At this step, cases may be pending more than nine months due to high caseload volume. Additionally, the employment verification and risk assessment conducted during the COM approval process can add significant delays depending on how easy or difficult it is to locate the applicant's employer to confirm the applicant's eligibility for an SIV. A congressionally mandated prioritization plan obligates State to focus special attention on the higher tiers during the COM approval process.¹⁴ Lower tiers, therefore, wait longer for review and analysis relative to higher tiers.

From June 13 through the end of the reporting period, Embassy Kabul was closed for interviews due to the prevalence of COVID-19 in Afghanistan. However, during this period, Embassy Kabul continued SIV processing steps not requiring in-person contact, such as printing and passing back issued visas.

How many SIV applications are pending as of June 30, 2021?

- Step 1 – 10,682 principal applicants had submitted some, but not all, of the documents required to apply for COM approval.
- Step 4 – 5,355 principal applicants had applications pending COM approval. These applicants have submitted all of their documents and are being reviewed for COM approval.
- Step 7 – 380 principal applicants had Form I-360 petitions pending with USCIS.
- Step 11 – 746 principal applicants and 2,412 derivative family members were pending scheduling for visa interviews. Applicants outside of Afghanistan may be interviewed at any U.S. embassy or consulate that adjudicates immigrant visa applications.
- Step 13 – Applications for approximately 306 principal applicants and 194 derivative family members were undergoing administrative processing as of June 30, 2021.

How many SIV applicants were interviewed in the Third Quarter of FY 2021?

¹⁴ Consistent with Section 7076 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (Public Law 116-6), enacted on February 15, 2019, applicants seeking Afghan SQ1 visas will be prioritized in the following order:

- 1) Interpreters and Translators
- 2) U.S. Government Direct Hire Employees
- 3) Contractors with U.S. Government Installation Badges
- 4) Implementing Partners
- 5) All Other Applicants

2,139 Afghan applicants who received COM approval were scheduled for an interview in the third quarter of FY 2021 under section 602(b) of the *Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009*, as amended.

How many denials were there in the Third Quarter of FY 2021?

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

- 621 Afghan principal applicants were deemed unqualified to receive COM approval or had the approval revoked during the third quarter of FY 2021. Applicants whose COM applications are denied or revoked can appeal the decision once within 120 days of notification, or thereafter at the discretion of the Secretary of State. 334 Afghans submitted appeals during the third quarter of FY 2021. Of the appeals adjudicated during this quarter, 193 were approved after the applicant submitted additional information.
- Nine principal applicants had a Form I-360 petition denied by USCIS during the third quarter of FY 2021.

What are the reasons for a COM denial?

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

- *Failure to establish qualifying employment by or on behalf of the U.S. government, or by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) or a successor mission.* Applications are denied for this reason if the applicant fails to establish qualifying employment. For information on qualifying employment, see the Department of State website at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/special-immg-visa-afghans-employed-us-gov.html>.
- *Insufficient documentation.* Applications are denied for this reason if the applicant fails to provide a required document, or if there is a deficiency in a document provided by the applicant.
- *Failure to establish the required length of employment by or on behalf of the U.S. government, or by ISAF or a successor mission, during the period specified in section 602(b) of the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, as amended.* Applicants who submitted applications for COM approval on or before September 30, 2015, must demonstrate one year of qualifying service. Applicants who submitted or submit applications for COM approval on or after October 1, 2015, must demonstrate two years of qualifying service.¹⁵

¹⁵ The Emergency Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021, enacted July 30, 2021, reduced the qualifying service requirement to one year. Applicants at the COM approval stage as of July 30, 2021 will be measured against the one-year of qualifying service requirement.

- *Failure to establish providing faithful and valuable service to the U.S. government.* Applications denied for this reason generally have involved cases lacking the requisite positive recommendation or evaluation. In some instances where faithful and valuable service was not confirmed, employment by or on behalf of the U.S. government had been terminated for cause.
- *Derogatory information associated with the applicant that is incompatible with the requirements of the SIV program.* This reason for denial generally relates to information that the applicant engaged in an unlawful, unethical, criminal, or terrorism-related activity.