



**Report to Congress on
Posting of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Quarterly Report on the
Department of State's Website
Section 1219 of the National Defense Authorization Act for
Fiscal Year 2014 (P.L. 113-66)**

The Department of State (State), the Department of Homeland Security, and other U.S. government (USG) departments and agencies involved in the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program are committed to helping Afghans 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 fourth quarter (Q4) of Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 (July 1, 2023, to September 30, 2023)?

Afghan Principal Applicants Issued in Q4	Afghan Derivative Applicants Issued in Q4	Total Afghan SIVs Issued in Q4	Total Afghan Numbers Used ¹	Remaining SIVs for Afghan Principal Applicants ²
881	2,990	3,871	26,910	11,590

¹ Total number of visas issued to SIV principal applicants overseas combined with SIV numbers used through domestic adjustments of status since permanent numbers became available on November 25, 2015.

² Numbers remaining are preliminary and subject to change. They are accurate as of the date of publication and account for recaptured numbers.

What efficiency improvements have been made to Afghan SIV processing?

On January 3, 2023, the National Visa Center (NVC) eliminated its post-Chief of Mission (COM) approval visa pre-processing backlog and has been maintaining a processing time of fewer than 10 business days to review incoming document submissions in the visa processing stage. Immigrant visa applicants can now complete all required pre-interview processes through the Consular Electronic Application Center (CEAC) website. The Afghan SIV Unit (ASIV Unit) began using advanced analytics to minimize data entry errors and added additional contract staff to process applications. ASIV processed 5 percent more COM approval applications during the fourth quarter of FY 2023 than in the prior quarter. State's Visa Office has streamlined and improved tracking and prioritization of those cases requiring additional administrative processing. The chart below describes the steps in the application process.

To ensure individuals issued SIVs abroad receive their lawful permanent resident cards ("green cards") in the mail more quickly upon arrival in the United States, USCIS and State have been transitioning to an electronic process to more efficiently share content between the two entities.

What is the average USG processing time for Afghan SIVs and how many cases are processed in that time?

The stages and steps in the Afghan SIV application process are outlined below and include the current average processing time for each step, including the time required by the relevant USG entities. This statistic captures total USG processing time in calendar days, beginning when the applicant first expresses interest in the program to the NVC and ending with the date of visa issuance at a U.S. embassy or consulate. It does not capture time taken for those steps in the SIV process outside the control of the USG and that depend solely on the applicant's initiative. However, even within each step below identified as under the control of the USG, there may be significant time spent waiting on applicant or third-party action not

attributable to the USG entities involved. Therefore, the average processing time listed below likely overestimates the total processing time solely attributable to the USG entities involved.

SIV Processing Steps ^{3,4}				
Stage	Step	Description	Average processing time in calendar days	Number of Cases Processed
COM application process	1	Applicant submits COM application package to NVC. ⁵	Applicant-controlled	N/A
	2	NVC reviews documents for completeness.	7	67,255 ⁶
COM application process	3	NVC sends completed application package to the ASIV Unit. ⁷	1	5,040
	4	COM staff review the COM application and form DS-157 petition for	254 ⁹	8,019

³ Processing steps are for SIVs authorized under section 602(b) of the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, as amended. Afghan nationals processed under 602(b) are given the SQ SIV classification.

⁴ Previous versions of this report listed 14 steps. During the first quarter of FY 2022, Step 5 “The ACOM advises NVC if the application is approved. If approved, NVC immediately sends approval letter to applicant” was fully automated and no longer requires manual processing. For this reason, as noted in the report covering the first quarter of FY 2022, the Department will no longer include this step in reporting.

⁵ At this stage, the applicant has contacted NVC to express interest in the program and provide the documents necessary to begin processing.

⁶ 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.

⁷ COM approval may be provided by the “appropriate Chief of Mission, or the designee of the appropriate Chief of Mission” (see Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-8), Section 602(b)(2)(D)). The ASIV director was the COM’s designee throughout this reporting period. Since the COM dissolved the COM Committee on August 19, 2021, the ASIV Unit sends COM approval agendas directly to the COM designee for a decision.

⁹ The rise in average processing time for Step 4 is due to the massive increase in cases that moved from NVC to the ASIV unit in recent quarters. Average processing time for Step 4 is expected to increase as the ASIV unit works to eliminate the backlog.

		special immigrant status and the COM or COM Designee makes a decision. The applicant is automatically informed of the decision. ⁸		
Form I-360 adjudication process	5	Applicant self-petitions to USCIS using Form I-360. ¹⁰	Applicant-controlled	N/A
	6	USCIS adjudicates petition and sends to NVC if approved. ¹¹	167 ¹²	22
Visa interview process, including pre- and post-interview ¹³	7	NVC sends instruction packet to applicant requesting standard immigrant visa documentation, including Form DS-260.	7	4,533
	8	Applicant submits required documentation to NVC.	Applicant-controlled	N/A

⁸ The COM approval process involves verifying the SIV applicant's ability to qualify for special immigrant status based on the information submitted in Step 1 above. This process may require input from third parties. Accordingly, the length of time spent at this stage may vary depending on the responsiveness of such third parties, as well as other factors.

¹⁰ Certain applicants, such as those already in the United States who had filed an unsigned DS-157 or applicants anywhere in the world who filed no DS-157, will need to file an I-360 to petition for special immigrant status. Additionally, applicants who filed an I-360 before July 20, 2022, are required to await a USCIS decision on their I-360; they may not switch to the DS-157 petition process.

¹¹ Form I-360 petitions filed with USCIS between July 1, 2023, and September 30, 2023.

¹² As of FY 2022 quarter four, the methodology for calculating the average processing time reflects the average time it took USCIS to adjudicate an I-360 petition completed in the quarter; the processing time is calculated from the date USCIS receives the petition to the date a final adjudicative decision is rendered on the petition (i.e., approved, denied, or administratively closed). Petitions where a request for evidence (RFE) or notice of intent to deny (NOID) was sent to the petitioner prior to final decision are filtered out of the processing time calculation. The petitioner's response time to the RFE or NOID is not calculated as part of the USCIS processing time.

¹³ 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 with USCIS.

	9	NVC reviews documents for completeness and corresponds with applicant when additional documentation is needed.	7	33,232 ¹⁴
	10	When the immigrant visa application is complete, and when the desired post of interview communicated to NVC by the applicant has interview availability, NVC schedules applicant for interview at a U.S. embassy or consulate. ¹⁵	137 ¹⁶	356
	11	Applicant is interviewed and biometrics are collected by consular officer on the scheduled appointment date. Administrative processing, if needed, is	N/A	1,240

¹⁴ As in Step 2, this number reflects the number of case reviews conducted by the NVC. The NVC counts a review each time a 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 per quarter.

¹⁵ This number only includes interviews scheduled by the NVC immediately following the case being documentarily completed. It does not include the interviews scheduled locally by an embassy or consulate following a case transfer from Embassy Kabul. Since Embassy Kabul suspended visa operations on August 31, 2021, NVC has been scheduling SIV applicants for visa interviews at any immigrant visa processing U.S. embassy or consulate in the world where the applicant is able to appear.

¹⁶ This number reflects the average processing time between when an applicant is considered documentarily complete and when they are scheduled for an interview. NVC schedules interviews for documentarily complete applicants who can appear at a designated immigrant visa processing post for an interview. In some cases, a lengthy period of time may elapse before an applicant notifies NVC they are able to travel to such a post. Although the applicant's ability to travel to a third country post is outside State's control, this figure nonetheless includes the time periods during which applicants are documentarily complete but are unable to travel to a designated immigrant visa processing post for an interview. Therefore, the average processing time for Step 10 is overinclusive and reflects time during which the applicant is not waiting for government-controlled action.

		initiated following the interview. ¹⁷		
	12	The applicant's case undergoes administrative processing, if required. ¹⁸	29	1,291
Visa issuance to eligible applicants	13	Upon completion of administrative processing, the visa is issued if applicant is eligible.	Applicant-controlled	N/A
		Total USG processing time in calendar days¹⁹	609	N/A

Why are applications pending more than nine months in USG-controlled stages of the SIV application?

The U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, suspended operations on August 31, 2021. Nevertheless, the USG continues to process SIV applications at all stages. Applicants must designate a U.S. embassy or consulate (IV post) outside Afghanistan where they may appear to have their visa interviews scheduled. Therefore, the average processing time at Step 10 includes days not under the control of the USG because the applicant has not designated an IV post for interview. The timeframes indicated for Steps 2 and 9 reflect NVC processing time only. Due to the surge in demand for the Afghan SIV related to the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, the State experienced a significant processing backlog, which has now moved to Step 4 of the process. The Afghan SIV Unit

¹⁷ Administrative processing may include a variety of security, fraud, or criminal background checks that are required before the visa may be issued.

¹⁸ Line 12 totals include data for SIV applicants who completed administrative processing between July 1, 2023, and September 30, 2023. Average processing time for remaining cases pending cannot be calculated until they are completed. A high number in this field reflects older cases being completed, not older cases languishing.

¹⁹ 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.

continues to surge staffing and resources to be able to alleviate this long processing backlog at the COM review step of the process.

How many SIV applications are pending as of September 30, 2023?

Step 1 – 68,678 principal applicants had submitted some, but not all, of the documents required to apply for COM approval.

Step 4 – 67,299²⁰ principal applicants were pending COM approval. These applicants submitted all their documents and were being reviewed for COM approval.

Step 6 – 42 principal applicants had Form I-360 petitions pending with USCIS.

Step 10 – 10,865 principal applicants and 52,222 derivative family members were pending scheduling of visa interviews. Applicants outside of Afghanistan may be interviewed at any U.S. embassy or consulate that adjudicates immigrant visa applications.

Step 12²¹ – Applications for approximately 207 principal applicants and 254 derivative family members were undergoing administrative processing.

In quarter four of FY 2023, 1,903 Afghan SIV principal applicants who received COM approval were interviewed at a U.S. embassy or consulate (this number does not include derivative family members). In FY 2023, 60 consular posts worldwide have interviewed at least one Afghan SIV applicant. Of these, most interviews were conducted by the Afghanistan Affairs Unit in Doha, Qatar, and U.S. embassies in Ankara, Türkiye; Islamabad, Pakistan; and Tirana, Albania.

²⁰ The rise in number of principal applicants pending COM approval is due to the massive increase in cases that moved from NVC to ASIV in recent quarters.

²¹ Administrative processing times for incoming cases were within range, but overall case volume is climbing. The primary reason for the increasing case volume is other government agencies. State flagged delays with these agencies, identified a solution and implemented it; and believes next quarter's case volume will be lower.

The following chart shows the number of Afghan nationals who underwent a visa interview in the fourth quarter of FY 2023 as part of their application for a SIV under the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, as amended.

Month	Principal Applicants	Derivative Family Members	Total
July	415	1,596	2,011
August	441	1,270	1,711
September	384	1,162	1,546
Total	1,240	4,028	5,268

How many denials were there in quarter four of FY 2023?

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

- 4,500 Afghan principal applicants were deemed unqualified to receive COM approval or had the approval revoked during the fourth quarter of FY 2023. Applicants whose COM applications are denied or revoked may appeal the decision once within 120 days of notification, or thereafter at the discretion of the Secretary of State. In the fourth quarter of FY 2023, 532 appeals were adjudicated. Of the appeals adjudicated during this quarter, 296 were approved after the applicant submitted additional information.
- USCIS denied 21 principal applicants' Form I-360 petitions during the fourth quarter of FY 2023.

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 USG 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-immig-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 at least one year of employment by or on behalf of the USG, 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.*
- *Failure to establish providing faithful and valuable service to the USG.* Applications denied for this reason generally have involved cases lacking the requisite positive recommendation or evaluation to establish faithful and valuable service as required by law. In some instances where faithful and valuable service was not confirmed, employment by or on behalf of the USG 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 the applicant engaged in an unlawful, unethical, criminal, or terrorism-related activity.