

Joint Department of State/Department of Homeland Security Report: Status of the Iraqi 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 Iraqi Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program are committed to helping the Iraqi men and women who have taken significant risks to support our military and civilian personnel. The U.S. government has devoted substantial resources to reducing the amount of time required to complete the Iraqi SIV process, authorized under section 1244 of the *Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2008*, as amended, while still ensuring thorough screening for national security concerns, and we continue to strive for improvements to the process.

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

Iraqi Principal Applicants Issued	Iraqi Derivative Applicants Issued	Total Iraqi SIVs Issued in FY2021 (through June 30, 2021)	Total Iraqi Numbers Used ¹	Remaining SIVs for Iraqi Principal Applicants
5	9	28	2,123	377

What efficiency improvements have been made to Iraqi SIV processing?

In the third quarter of FY 2021, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad was able to issue three Iraqi SIV cases that had been interviewed before the Embassy was forced to close in December of 2019. This was possible only after significant research to identify these cases, a brief lull in American Citizen Services cases, and an overlap of an additional officer due to transfer from post.

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

All steps in the Iraqi SIV application process are outlined below and include the current average processing time for all involved U.S. government entities. This statistic captures total U.S. government processing time in calendar days, beginning when the applicant first expresses interest in the program to State's National Visa Center (NVC)² and ending with the date of visa issuance at a U.S. embassy or consulate. 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.

¹ Number of visas issued since permanent numbers became available on January 1, 2014.

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.

Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Processing Steps ³				
Stage	Step	Description	Average processing times in calendar days	Number of Cases Processed
Chief of Mission (COM) application process	1	Applicant submits COM application package to State's NVC. (The deadline for this step was September 30, 2014.)	Applicant-controlled	N/A
	2	NVC reviews documents for completeness.	1	27 ⁴
	3	NVC sends completed application package to U.S. Embassy Baghdad.	1	0
	4	U.S. Embassy Baghdad reviews COM application and makes a decision to approve or deny.	N/A ⁵	0
	5	U.S. Embassy Baghdad advises NVC if COM application is approved. NVC immediately sends approval letter to applicant. (If any documents reveal that the applicant does not qualify for the program, the COM application is denied.)	1	0
Form I-360 adjudication process	6	Applicant self-petitions to DHS U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) using form I-360.	Applicant-controlled	N/A
	7	USCIS adjudicates petition and sends to NVC if approved. ⁶	29	8
Visa Interview Process, including pre- and	8	NVC sends instruction packet to applicant requesting standard immigrant visa documentation, including DS-260 immigrant visa application.	1	10
	9	Applicant submits required documentation to NVC.	Applicant-controlled	N/A

³ Processing steps are for SIVs authorized under section 1244 of the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2008, as amended. This applies to Iraqi nationals in the SQ classification.

⁴ This number reflects the number of case reviews conducted by the National Visa Center within the quarter. The National Visa Center 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 National Visa Center because an individual case might be reviewed multiple times in a quarter.

⁵ The deadline for Iraqi principal applicants to submit new applications for Chief of Mission approval was September 30, 2014.

⁶ For I-360 petitions filed with USCIS between April 1, 2021 and June 30, 2021.

post-interview ⁷	10	NVC reviews documents for completeness, corresponding with applicant when additional documentation is needed.	10	19 ⁸
	11	When the visa application is complete, NVC schedules applicant for next available interview at a U.S. Embassy. ⁹	N/A ¹⁰	0
	12	Applicant is interviewed by consular officer on the scheduled appointment date. Administrative processing is initiated following the interview. ¹¹	1	0
	13	The applicant's case undergoes administrative processing.	139	21
Visa issuance to eligible applicants	14	Upon completion of administrative processing, the applicant is instructed to obtain a medical exam. Once the medical exam is completed, the visa is issued if the applicant is eligible. In some cases, the passport will have expired and requires renewal by the applicant.	Applicant-controlled	N/A
		Total U.S. government processing time in calendar days¹²	183	N/A

Why are applications pending longer than nine months?

Certain applications may be pending longer than nine months for completion of administrative processing (Step 13). Administrative processing often involves rigorous background checks, which are essential to the integrity of the SIV program and U.S. national security. The current high average reflects the fact that some long outstanding cases, including two from 2019, were completed in the current reporting period. Additionally, there are very few incoming cases.

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

⁷ The majority of applicants receive SIV status by going through the process explained in this chart. Applicants who obtain SIV status in the United States apply for [adjustment of status](#) from USCIS.

⁸ As in Step 2, this number reflects the number of case reviews conducted by the National Visa Center. The National Visa Center 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 National Visa Center because an individual case might be reviewed multiple times in a quarter.

⁹ As of November 2017, NVC began scheduling SIV applicants at other embassies on behalf of the U.S. Embassy Baghdad.

¹⁰ During the third quarter, no Iraqi SQ cases became documentarily complete.

¹¹ Administrative processing may include a variety of security, fraud, or criminal background checks that are required before the visa may be issued.

¹² 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.

- Step 1 – There were no new COM applications submitted by Iraqi principal applicants pending at NVC during this period. The deadline for Iraqis to apply for COM approval was September 30, 2014.
- Step 7 – 62 Iraqi principal applicants had a Form I-360 petition pending with USCIS.
- Step 11 – There is one principal applicant and five derivative family members pending scheduling for visa interviews.
- Step 13 – Applications for 46 principal applicants and 17 family members were undergoing administrative processing as of June 30, 2021.

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

The deadline to submit an application for COM approval was September 30, 2014. There were no SIV applicants who, subsequent to COM approval, were scheduled for an interview in the third quarter of FY 2021.

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

- No principal applicants were deemed unqualified to receive COM approval or had their approval revoked during the third quarter of FY 2021. Applicants whose COM applications are denied or revoked are able to submit one appeal within 120 days of receiving the denial or revocation letter. Twenty-nine principal applicants were in appeal status during the third quarter of FY 2021.
- One principal applicant 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 four reasons:

- *Failure to establish employment by or on behalf of the U.S. government.* 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-visas-iraqis-employed-us-gov.html>
- *Failure to establish at least one year of employment by or on behalf of the U.S. government between March 20, 2003, and September 30, 2013.*
- *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.