



Relocation and Resettlement Outcomes of Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Holders

INTRODUCTION

AFGHAN SIV PROGRAM

In 2009, Congress established a visa program to resettle Afghans who had worked on behalf of the United States in Afghanistan and had experienced an ongoing and serious threat as a result of their employment with the U.S. government. 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.”

Source: Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, Public Law 111-8, March 11, 2009, § 602(b), codified at 8 U.S.C. § 1101 note, “Afghan Allies Protection.”

On April 14, 2021, President Biden announced plans to complete the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. As the Taliban entered Kabul on August 15, 2021, the Afghan President fled the country, and the country’s security forces collapsed. In response, the Department of State (Department) and the Department of Defense evacuated U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, and allies, including Afghan SIV applicants, from Afghanistan. After the evacuation, the Department suspended operations at Embassy Kabul on August 31, 2021, and moved some of its operations in September 2021 to Embassy Doha, Qatar.

OIG conducted this review to respond to specific congressional requests¹ regarding the (1) Department’s efforts to develop contingency plans for the safe relocation of Afghan SIV holders from Afghanistan prior to August 31, 2021, (2) the number of Afghan SIV holders remaining in Afghanistan after August 31, 2021, (3) the resettlement outcomes for Afghan SIV holders compared with the outcomes for other participants in the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), and (4) the number of Afghan SIV holders becoming naturalized U.S. citizens.

BACKGROUND

AFGHAN SIV HOLDERS’ ELIGIBILITY FOR REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

Afghan SIV holders are not considered refugees but are eligible for the same transportation and resettlement assistance, entitlement programs, and other benefits as refugees admitted under the USRAP.² Afghan SIV holders resettled through USRAP are eligible for the Reception and Placement Program funded by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM).³ Most Afghan SIV holders approved for admission to the United States are sponsored by one of ten resettlement agencies participating in the Reception and Placement Program.⁴ As of January 2023, the resettlement agencies were working with 300 local affiliates.⁵

The Reception and Placement Program provides initial support to USRAP participants, including Afghan SIV holders, over a period of 30-90 days. This support includes assistance with housing, essential furnishings, food, clothing, and cultural orientation. During this period, program participants receive assistance to access social services and community services and to receive referrals to other social, medical, and employment services.

In addition, USRAP participants, including Afghan SIV holders, can receive assistance through the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement, for up to 5 years. That agency funds complementary programs that run concurrently with PRM’s programs and provide longer-term integration and self-sufficiency support, such as cash and medical assistance, employment services, and health services. Participants must apply for Office of Refugee Resettlement programs. Additionally, there are a wide variety of other federal and state programs and services that USRAP participants, including Afghan SIV holders, can access.

FIGURE 1: RESETTLEMENT AGENCY INTEGRATION SERVICES PROVIDED UNDER USRAP



Source: Generated by OIG based on cooperative agreement requirements and resettlement agency process flow charts.

RESULTS

CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR THE SAFE RELOCATION OF SIV HOLDERS FROM AFGHANISTAN

 From the SIV program’s inception in **2009 through July 2021**, Afghan SIV holders generally departed Afghanistan on their own or with transportation assistance from the Department after being issued an SIV. Separately, Embassy Kabul conducted emergency action planning in accordance with the Foreign Affairs Handbook, which included planning related to Embassy personnel, American citizens, and other persons of interest⁶ but did not plan or implement any changes unique to SIV relocation. In July 2021, as part of that emergency action planning, the Department monitored the number of Afghan SIV applicants in-process as it gathered information about the number of people needing relocation assistance.



However, in **early July 2021**, in response to the growing Taliban threat, the Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources directed the Department to explore establishing a task force to expedite Afghan SIV applicant processing and relocation. Embassy Kabul also began planning to expedite SIV application processing. The Department created two task forces to relocate Afghan SIV holders to the United States who (1) had completed almost the entire SIV process and had received conditional SIVs⁷ or (2) had previously been issued an SIV but were still in Afghanistan.



On **July 15, 2021**, the Acting Under Secretary of State for Management and Executive Secretary jointly established the Afghanistan Coordination Task Force (ACTF) to oversee the Department’s planning, management, and logistics of relocating Afghan SIV applicants who had received conditional SIVs.



On **July 21, 2021**, Embassy Kabul established the Kabul Relocation Task Force to work in coordination with the ACTF and facilitate the movement of Afghan SIV holders in Afghanistan, along with their family members, via charter flights from Kabul to the United States. In support of the relocation effort, Embassy Kabul’s Consular Affairs section worked to expedite processing of Afghan SIV applicants who had completed their visa interview and administrative screening and had passed an abbreviated medical examination to determine if they were fit to fly.

SIV HOLDERS IN AFGHANISTAN – JULY 29, 2021

On July 29, 2021, there were **480** principal SIV holders in Afghanistan. Of this number, **288** SIV holders were awaiting travel to the United States. In addition, there were **2,656** principal Afghan SIV applicants whose applications were at Embassy Kabul pending final processing.

Source: U.S. Digital Service, an office located within the Executive Office of the President, published on August 2, 2021.



On **August 8, 2021**, Embassy Kabul, in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security, began issuing foil-less, or electronic, SIVs to approved Afghan applicants to speed up visa delivery for recipients slated to travel on U.S. government-chartered flights out of Afghanistan. On **August 12, 2021**, the Secretaries of State and of Homeland Security exercised their authority to waive the required panel physician examination for SIV applicants in Afghanistan who had completed all other steps of the application process and had received conditional visas for admission into the United States.⁸



According to Department records, **from July 29 to August 15, 2021**, the Department chartered 10 relocation flights transporting 1,962 Afghan SIV holders to the United States.⁹ By the end of this time period, Embassy Kabul was operating one flight per day and was preparing to operate twice-daily flights to relocate approximately 1,000 more people who were ready to be offered transportation. However, these plans never materialized because Embassy Kabul was evacuated on August 15, 2021, the Kabul Relocation Task Force was disbanded, and the last Department-sponsored commercial SIV charter relocation flight from Kabul International Airport was operated on **August 15, 2021**.

FIGURE 2: AFGHAN’S SIV HOLDERS RELOCATED ON CHARTER FLIGHTS: JULY 29–AUGUST 15, 2021



Source: Generated by OIG based on data provided by the Bureau of Consular Affairs, Visa Services.



In addition to the relocation flights, consular officials told OIG that they started planning in **mid-July 2021** for an alternative consular site to process SIVs as a contingency if an attack on the embassy occurred.



In **late July and early August 2021**, consular officials took actions to set up and pre-stage consular capabilities at a Department facility on Camp Alvarado, which was at Kabul International Airport. According to the Consul General at Embassy Kabul on the ground at that time, the embassy consular officials’ efforts included obtaining secure office space and a safe to store controlled items, establishing a secure network connection, and moving supplies and equipment to Camp Alvarado. In addition, the senior Embassy Kabul consular official, on the ground at that time, stated that the Camp Alvarado location was stocked with a computer that had access to consular systems, a printer, blank visa foils, blank emergency passports, and stamps/seals.



According to the senior consular official and Embassy Kabul’s after-action report reviewed by OIG, the United States lost control of the gates and wall outside the building at Camp Alvarado on **August 15, 2021**. Consequently, the senior consular official on the ground at that time told OIG that an Embassy Regional Security Officer directed that consular operations be immediately moved from Camp Alvarado to a safer location within the airport. Before moving from Camp Alvarado, Department officials stated that they destroyed consular information related to Afghan SIV holders and applicants.



On **August 30, 2021**, the Secretary of State made remarks stating that more than 123,000 people had been safely flown out of Afghanistan. According to the Department of Homeland Security, 36,821 of the Afghan evacuees were SIV applicants.¹⁰

EFFORTS TO RELOCATE AFGHAN SIV HOLDERS AND APPLICANTS FROM AFGHANISTAN AFTER AUGUST 31, 2021

- There were no relocation flights in September and October 2021 because of a lack of space to accept more people in the relocation centers in the countries where SIV applicants were to be transported.
- On October 12, 2021, the ACTF became the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts and took the lead on the logistics of transporting SIV holders and applicants out of Afghanistan and of resuming relocation flights from Afghanistan to Doha, Qatar.
- To relocate Afghan SIV holders and applicants from within Afghanistan, the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts required cooperation from the Taliban.
- From September 2021 to February 2023, the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts relocated 8,950 SIV applicants from Afghanistan for continued Afghan SIV processing.
- Upon arrival in Qatar, consular officials processed and interviewed Afghan SIV applicants. Once an applicant received an SIV, the Department arranged onward transportation for the Afghan SIV holder to the United States.

AFGHAN SIV HOLDERS REMAINING IN AFGHANISTAN



Officials from the Department’s Center for Analytics, within the Office of the Under Secretary of State for Management, told OIG that the Department did not maintain data regarding the number of SIV holders remaining in Afghanistan from **August 2 to November 2, 2021**, because of the evacuation of Embassy Kabul on August 15, 2021.



According to Department officials, immediately following the evacuation, the Department temporarily stopped updating SIV data; therefore, no definitive data exists on how many SIV holders remained in Afghanistan during that time.¹¹ On **November 2, 2021**, the Department resumed collecting Afghan SIV holder data to report the number of Afghan SIV holders who remained in Afghanistan¹² and to weekly report the number of SIV applications in process.^{13,14}



The visas for Afghan SIV holders who remained in Afghanistan and received their visas prior to August 15, 2021, expired in accordance with the expiration of the required medical examination.¹⁵ In addition, following the evacuation of the Kabul embassy on **August 15, 2021**, the Department did not have the ability to issue or re-issue visas inside Afghanistan. However, Afghans with an expired SIV qualified for relocation through Operation Enduring Welcome. Once relocated, the SIV could be reissued at another U.S. Embassy.

SIV HOLDERS REMAINING IN AFGHANISTAN – MARCH 21, 2023

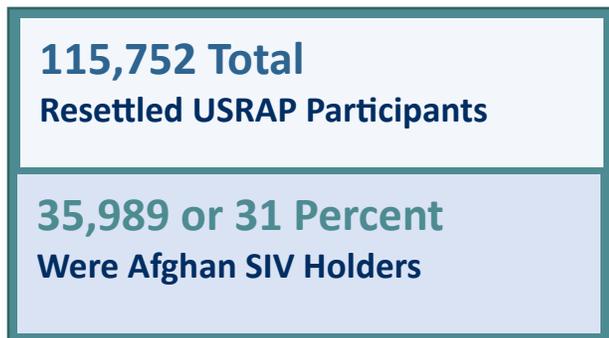
According to the Department’s SIV pipeline report, there were **210** principal SIV holders and an additional **152,091** principal Afghan SIV applicants who remained in Afghanistan whose applications were still undergoing processing.

Source: Center for Analytics SIV Pipeline Report, published on March 21, 2023.

RESETTLEMENT OUTCOMES FOR AFGHAN SIV HOLDERS AND OTHER USRAP PARTICIPANTS

Afghan SIV holders are not considered refugees but are eligible for the same transportation and resettlement assistance, entitlement programs, and other benefits as are refugees admitted under USRAP.^{16,17} According to PRM, from October 2018 through September 2022, 35,989 Afghan SIV holders were resettled in the United States.

FIGURE 3: AFGHAN SIV HOLDERS RESETTLED THROUGH USRAP: OCTOBER 2018–SEPTEMBER 2022



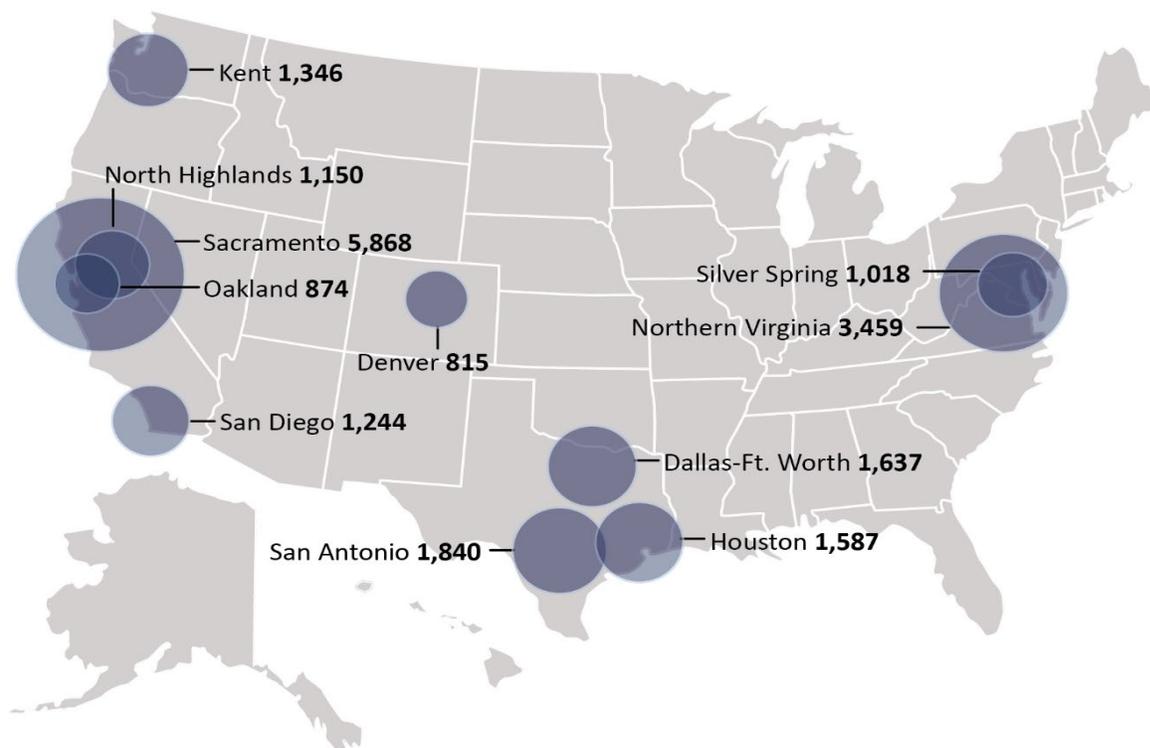
Source: Generated by OIG based on USRAP and Afghan SIV holders' data provided by PRM on February 23, 2023.

Afghan SIV holders were resettled in 176 communities throughout the United States. Figure 4 shows the major

communities where Afghan SIV holders were resettled from October 2018 through September 2022.

PRM officials said that PRM holds weekly meetings with the resettlement agencies during which the list of expected USRAP arrivals is reviewed and the arrivals are allocated among them. PRM calculates each resettlement agency's target number of arrivals in advance of the meeting. Arrivals are grouped into eight different selection pools. These pools include Afghan SIV holders as well as refugees with ties to people in the United States and Afghan SIV holders who have no ties to people in the United States. Whether an individual has U.S. ties in a specific geographical area is an important placement consideration. Another factor considered is whether the arrivals have medical conditions. The resettlement agencies make selections in an alphabetical round-robin format until the list of arrivals for the week has been exhausted.

FIGURE 4: LARGEST AFGHAN SIV HOLDER RESETTLEMENT AREAS: OCTOBER 2018–SEPTEMBER 2022

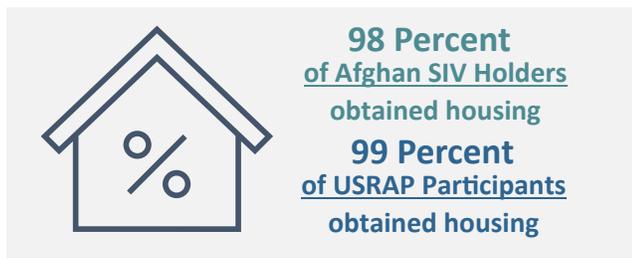


Source: Generated by OIG based on Afghan SIV holder resettlement data provided by PRM on February 23, 2023.

Housing

PRM requires resettlement agencies to provide Afghan SIV holders decent, safe, and sanitary housing and to supply furniture and household items that are clean, functional, and in good condition.¹⁸ To implement this requirement, the resettlement agencies and their local affiliates assist SIV holders to find and lease housing.¹⁹ OIG determined, based on PRM reporting, that from October 2018 through September 2022, 98 percent of Afghan SIV holders were resettled in permanent housing within 30 days, compared with 99 percent of refugees under USRAP.

FIGURE 5: AFGHAN SIV HOLDERS AND ALL OTHER USRAP PARTICIPANTS IN PERMANENT HOUSING WITHIN 30 DAYS: OCTOBER 2018–SEPTEMBER 2022



Source: Generated by OIG based on Afghan SIV holders and USRAP housing data provided by PRM on February 23, 2023.

Resettlement agency officials in Sacramento, CA, and Manassas, VA, told OIG that housing was a challenge affecting the success of resettlement. New arrivals to the United States sometimes stayed with relatives, other contacts, or in hotels and short-term rentals until permanent housing was found. Officials from resettlement agencies stated that they used their network of local landlords and property managers to explore a variety of permanent housing arrangements (e.g., shared housing, apartments, or single-family homes), depending on the participants' financial situation and the availability of local offerings. In finding permanent housing, officials from resettlement agencies reported challenges finding suitable housing for large families in high-demand areas. For example, OIG found that in Sacramento, CA, one resettlement agency used grants and low interest loans to purchase properties, which it then owned, to offer Afghan SIV holders rental housing.

School Enrollment

PRM requires local resettlement agencies to enroll school-aged children²⁰ in school within 30 days of their arrival.²¹ OIG determined, based on PRM reporting, that from October 2018 through September 2022, **99 percent of all school-aged children**, both Afghan SIV holders and refugees under USRAP, were enrolled in school within 30 days. In Manassas, VA, local affiliate officials told OIG that the housing, employment, and school situations all become intertwined. The employment situation determined the affordability and location of the housing, which then determined whether the children would be attending the local school or require transportation to a school that is farther away. Parents may have to provide transportation to school if it is not provided by the school district.

Officials from the resettlement agencies stated that their education related responsibilities involved much more than just enrolling children in school. For example, the resettlement agencies' local affiliates must provide translation services for school registration appointments and, in many cases, enroll children into English as a Second Language programs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, local affiliates also helped arrange for internet access and computers for remote learning.

Also in Sacramento, CA, several Afghan SIV holders expressed concern that there were no English as a Second Language classes in the local elementary schools and that non-English-speaking children were attending classes without understanding what was being taught. In Manassas, VA, however, resettlement agency officials said all the schools they worked with had English as a Second Language programs.

Employment

PRM requires resettlement agencies to assist program participants in finding jobs by enrolling them with employment services within 30 days of their arrival, assisting with obtaining needed federal identification documentation, and providing transportation, as needed, to job interviews and job training.²² Based on PRM reporting, OIG determined that 23 percent of Afghan SIV holders who were of working age were employed at

the end of the 90-day reception and placement period, compared with 31 percent of refugees under USRAP who were not SIV holders.

FIGURE 6: AFGHAN SIV HOLDERS AND ALL OTHER USRAP PARTICIPANTS EMPLOYMENT: OCTOBER 2018–SEPTEMBER 2022



Source: Generated by OIG based on data on participants 18 and older provided by PRM on February 23, 2023.

According to officials from resettlement agencies and their local affiliates, Afghan SIV holders’ employment rates might have been lower than other refugees under USRAP for various factors. For example, Afghan SIV holders were generally highly educated and held positions such as program managers and medical personnel in Afghanistan. As a result, Afghan SIV holders might have been unwilling to accept entry-level positions. In addition, some female program participants with pre-school age children might be reluctant to work because of the need to provide childcare.

Resettlement agencies also help Afghan SIV holders tailor their resumes for jobs in the United States and conduct local job fairs. OIG attended one job fair and observed recruiters mainly seeking applicants for entry-level positions, such as warehouse jobs, machine operators, and delivery truck drivers. Some of these employers offered paid training for needed employment credentials such as a Commercial Driver’s License.

FIGURE 7: JOB INFORMATION BOARD AND ATTENDEES AT A LOCAL AFFILIATE’S JOB FAIR



Source: Photographs taken by OIG at a Sacramento, CA, local affiliate’s facility on September 21, 2022.

NUMBER OF AFGHAN SIV HOLDERS BECOMING NATURALIZED U.S. CITIZENS

The Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Office of Performance and Quality reported that 21,949 Afghans became U.S. citizens from FY 2019 through FY 2022. Of those who became citizens, 14,064 (64 percent) were Afghan SIV holders, both principal and derivative SIV holders.²³ In addition, the Office of Performance and Quality reported that 364,723 refugees under USRAP became U.S. citizens during the same period.²⁴

NATURALIZED U.S. CITIZEN REQUIREMENTS



Be at least 18 years old when filling out application for naturalization



Resided continuously in the U.S. for at least 5 years as a lawful permanent resident



Demonstrate an ability to read, write, and speak basic English



Be a lawfully admitted permanent resident of the United States



Have an attachment to the principles of the U.S. Constitution



Demonstrate a basic knowledge of U.S. history, government, and civic principles

21,949 Afghans became U.S. citizens from FY 2019 through FY 2022. **14,064 (64 percent)** were Afghan SIV holders.

Source: Developed by OIG from information provided to OIG by USCIS; Naturalization data were provided by the Department of Homeland Security, USCIS, Office of Performance and Quality. OIG did not independently verify the citizenship data.

The naturalization data for Afghans do not reflect the large influx of Afghan SIV holders who arrived in the United States since August 2021, as they are not yet eligible to apply for naturalization. As with other applicants for naturalization, an Afghan SIV holder seeking to apply to become a naturalized U.S. citizen must have resided continuously in the United States for at least 5 years immediately preceding their application for naturalization, and up to the time of admission to citizenship, among other requirements.²⁵ It is not possible to correlate arrivals in the United States with naturalization data as each individual decides when or if to apply for naturalization. Department of Homeland Security data show that in 2021 the median length of time individuals who naturalized had been in the country was 7 years.

OIG previously reported that from the program’s inception in 2009 through 2014, the Department issued 4,862 Afghan SIVs to principal applicants.²⁶ From 2015 through 2017, the Department issued an additional 10,159 Afghan SIVs to primary applicants, for a total of 15,021 SIVs issued from 2009 through 2017. From 2018 through 2021, the Department issued an additional 7,064 Afghan SIVs to principal applicants.

FIGURE 8: AFGHAN SIVS ISSUED AND NATURALIZATION ELIGIBILITY: 2009 THROUGH 2021



Source: OIG, *Information Report: Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program Metrics* (AUD-MERO-22-38, September 2022).



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APPENDIX

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

In the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, multiple congressional committees requested that the Department of State (Department), Office of Inspector General (OIG), review a range of topics regarding the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program. OIG is issuing a series of reports in response to those requests. This report addresses specific congressional questions involving the relocation and resettlement of Afghan SIV holders, including (1) the efforts to develop contingency plans for the safe relocation of Afghan SIV holders from Afghanistan prior to August 31, 2021, (2) the number of Afghan SIV holders remaining in Afghanistan after August 31, 2021, (3) the resettlement outcomes for Afghan SIV holders compared with the outcomes for other participants in the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), and (4) the number of Afghan SIV holders becoming naturalized U.S. citizens.

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 419 of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (see 5 U.S.C § 419). OIG conducted its work from July 2022 through March 2023 in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area and Sacramento, CA. OIG conducted this evaluation 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 that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for the information presented in this report.

To perform this review, OIG reviewed applicable laws and Department requirements established in the Foreign Affairs Manual and the Foreign Affairs Handbook. OIG also interviewed officials from the Bureau for Population, Migration, and Refugees (PRM); the Bureau of Consular Affairs; the Office of the Under Secretary for Management, Office of Management Strategy and Solutions, Center for Analytics; Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts; and the four resettlement agencies participating in PRM's USRAP that resettled SIV holders in Sacramento, CA, and Manassas, VA, and their local affiliates. OIG also conducted roundtables with selected SIV holders in Sacramento, CA, to discuss their resettlement experience. OIG conducted fieldwork in Sacramento, CA, because of the large number of Afghan SIV holders resettling in that area. OIG also conducted fieldwork in Manassas, VA, because of its proximity to OIG's offices and a significant resettled Afghan community in the northern Virginia area.

OIG obtained and analyzed PRM data on resettlement outcomes of USRAP participants, including Afghan SIV holders, who participated in the USRAP during FY 2019 through FY 2022. OIG also reviewed weekly reporting on the number of Afghan SIV holders, as well as people in the SIV application process, who were believed to be in Afghanistan. Because the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is responsible for the process by which legal permanent residents in the United States become naturalized U.S. citizens, OIG obtained relevant data from it on the number of Afghans, including Afghan SIV holders, who became naturalized U.S. citizens during the period from FY 2019 through FY 2022.

During this project, OIG coordinated its work internally with the Office of Evaluations and Special Projects, which reviewed the challenges faced by the nine resettlement agencies in implementing the Afghan Placement and Assistance program²⁷ and lessons learned for resettlement efforts.²⁸ In addition, OIG coordinated its work with other Offices of Inspectors General that were 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 resettlement data from PRM, including data on the number of Afghan SIV holders and other USRAP participants resettled in the United States. In addition, the resettlement data included information on where people were located within the United States, as well as resettlement outcome-related data on school enrollment, employment status, and housing placement during the reception and placement period funded by PRM. OIG identified two systems within the Department that were being used to process SIV holders and USRAP participants for resettlement outcome information during FY 2019 to FY 2022—START and the Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System. Both systems are operated and maintained by PRM.²⁹ Because PRM aggregates resettlement data provided by its ten resettlement agencies, which in turn aggregate data provided by their 300 local affiliates, OIG obtained information on how the data are collected and aggregated as well as the quality control procedures used to ensure that the data are accurate.

In assessing the reliability of resettlement data, OIG took the following steps.

- Observed how the local affiliates it visited populated and reviewed case files. These case files were the source of the raw data on resettlement outcomes.
- Discussed data entry and quality control procedures used to ensure that data were being entered accurately into case files with the local affiliates OIG visited and with the resettlement agency officials with whom OIG met.

- Discussed with PRM the internal controls and quality control procedures that PRM had in place to ensure that data on resettlement outcomes are being entered accurately.
- Reviewed the standard operating procedures that guide resettlement data quality control created by the local affiliates, resettlement agencies, and PRM to ensure that resettlement data are entered accurately.

Based on its review, OIG found that the resettlement data provided by the Department were sufficiently reliable for purposes of this review.

The Center for Analytics produces a weekly report that provides aggregate data on the number of Afghan SIV applicants remaining in each stage of the pipeline, along with information on whether those applicants are assumed to be in Afghanistan. OIG interviewed Center for Analytics officials about how the pipeline report was created and the sources on which it was based. OIG also assessed the written methodology describing the report’s preparation. OIG developed a table crosswalking the application stages with the underlying information systems containing that information and verified its accuracy with Center for Analytics officials. Based on this assessment, OIG concluded that the pipeline data provided by the Department were sufficiently reliable for purposes of this review.

Data on Afghan SIV holders who have become U.S. citizens, as well as all naturalization data, were developed by the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Office of Performance and Quality. Because this organization is outside of the Department of State, OIG relied on the organization’s reporting without performing additional testing.

OIG received technical comments from PRM on a draft of this report. OIG reviewed and incorporated the technical comments into the final report, as appropriate.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACTF	Afghanistan Coordination Task Force
OIG	Office of Inspector General
PRM	Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
SIV	special immigrant visa
U.S.C.	United States Code
USCIS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
USRAP	U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

OIG appreciates the Department’s cooperation with our office and the ongoing engagement. OIG’s Mike Vennemann (Division Director), Steve Sternlieb (Audit Manager), Laura Miller (Management Analyst), Philip White (Management Analyst), and Bonnie Stephens (Visual Informational Specialist) were key contributors to this report.

END NOTES

¹ 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. OIG issued a series of reports to address questions from Congress: *Information Report: Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program Metrics* (AUD-MERO-22-38, September 2022) and *Compliance Follow-Up Review of the Afghan Special*

Immigrant Visa Program (AUD-MERO-23-01, October 2022). Additional OIG reports are being prepared to address the remaining questions, as well as additional topic areas outlined in the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Public Law 117-263, § 5275.

² PRM, *About Refugee Admissions*, page 2, www.state.gov/refugee-admissions/about/.

³ PRM is the humanitarian bureau of the Department.

⁴ Under the Reception and Placement Program, refugees approved for admission to the United States are sponsored by a nonprofit resettlement agency, which is funded through a cooperative agreement with the Department. The resettlement agencies work with local affiliates throughout the United States to resettle refugees and SIV holders.

⁵ A local affiliate is defined by PRM in the cooperative agreement as a public or nonprofit entity that has a written agreement with a resettlement agency to assist in resettling USRAP participants in local communities.

⁶ 12 Foreign Affairs Handbook -1 H-030 Post Emergency Action Plan. In May 2023, OIG published a classified report on Embassy Kabul's emergency action planning: *Review of Emergency Action Planning Guiding the Evacuation and Suspension of Operations at U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan* (AUD-MERO-23-15, May 2023).

⁷ Conditional SIVs were issued to Afghan SIV applicants who had completed their visa interview and administrative screening and had passed an abbreviated medical examination to determine if they were fit to fly. Conditional SIV holders were required to complete their medical examinations upon arrival in the United States.

⁸ On July 30, 2021, Congress allowed the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Homeland Security to jointly issue a blanket waiver of the requirement that SIV applicants should undergo a medical examination prior to issuance of an immigrant visa or admission to the United States. An alien who receives a waiver of the medical examination requirement under this section shall be considered, at the time of admission to the United States, as an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence on a conditional basis. See Emergency Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021, Public Law 117-31, July 30, 2021, § 402.

⁹ The Department's Bureau of Administration, Office of Logistics Management contracted charter flights on behalf of Embassy Kabul to relocate Afghan SIV holders. According to a senior Kabul Relocation Task Force official, the relocation flights had a 5 to 10 percent no-show rate due to factors including travelers testing positive for COVID-19, experiencing difficulty getting to the airport, and not being ready to depart for personal reasons. The Department's Bureau of Administration, Office of Logistics Management, which chartered the flights, provided OIG with a list of each of the charter flights that included the flight number, the date it operated, and the number of passengers. All 10 flights

departed from Kabul International Airport and arrived in Washington, DC. The Afghans transported on the relocation flights, according to the documentation OIG reviewed, were "principal" and "derivative" applicants who fulfilled the SIV program qualifications. A principal applicant may be accompanied by a spouse and children under 21 years of age, referred to as "derivative applicants." 8 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 1101 note, "Afghan Allies Protection," § 602(b)(2)(B).

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Homeland Security report, *Department of Homeland Security Operation Allies Welcome Afghan Evacuee Report*, December 2021, page 4, states that the number of Afghan evacuees who were SIV applicants includes Afghan evacuees who were known to be eligible to apply to the SIV program, had not applied as of December 16, 2021, but were expected to do so. The report states that the data included principal applicants and their immediate family members.

¹¹ On October 6, 2021, the Department resumed reporting on the number of Afghan SIV applications still in process. The reporting resumed in response to interest from the Bureau of Consular Affairs and the National Security Council on the number of SIV applicants in process. On November 2, 2021, the Department expanded its reporting to include the number of principal SIV holders remaining in Afghanistan.

¹² 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 Protection arrivals data, or noncombatant evacuation operations tracking system data in instances in which the Department provided transportation out of Afghanistan. Applicants who were not confirmed to have departed were assumed to be in Afghanistan.

¹³ In November 2021, the Department's Under Secretary of State for Management, Office of Management Strategy and Solutions, Center for Analytics, began producing a weekly SIV pipeline report that provides data on SIV applicants and holders.

¹⁴ The Afghan SIV process begins with an applicant's initial email to the National Visa Center requesting an SIV. The National Visa Center 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 through September 1, 2021. From December 1, 2021, through June 1, 2022, the email backlog exceeded 300,000 emails. See OIG, *Information Report: Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program Metrics*, page 12 (AUD-MERO-22-38, September 2022).

¹⁵ As with other immigrant visas, Afghan SIV validity is set according to the expiration of the required medical examination. SIVs are valid for a maximum of 6 months but can have a shorter validity period based on when the medical examination was completed and whether there were any individual medical concerns. See 9 FAM 504.10-2(A),

"Immigrant Visa Validity" and 9 FAM 302.2-3(C), "Validity Period of an Applicant's Medical Examination for Immigrant Visa Applicants."

¹⁶ As part of the SIV application process, the principal applicant must complete a Form DS-234 for themselves and each family member requesting resettlement benefits and then submit the form to PRM's Resettlement Support Center Middle East and North Africa by email before arriving in the United States. SIV holders can also "walk-in" to their nearest resettlement agency after arriving in the United States.

¹⁷ PRM, About Refugee Admissions, page 2, www.state.gov/refugee-admissions/about/. See also OIG, *Review of Challenges in the Afghan Placement and Assistance Program* (ESP-23-01, March 2023).

¹⁸ Fiscal Year 2021 Reception and Placement Program model cooperative agreement between the Department and resettlement agencies, page 2.

¹⁹ Resettlement agencies are required to provide initial housing. The Reception and Placement Program also provides direct financial assistance, the majority of which goes to pay for housing. In addition, local affiliates often supplement this amount with private or other resources. PRM and the resettlement agencies also help program participants enroll in employment and job development programs and apply for public assistance for which they qualify to generate the income needed to pay rent.

²⁰ School-aged children do not include those children who are too young for elementary school or have already completed high school.

²¹ Model cooperative agreement, page 31.

²² *Ibid.*, pages 2, 31, and 32.

²³ SIV holders include both primary Afghan SIV applicants and derivatives who obtained Afghan SIVs.

²⁴ Naturalization data were provided by the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Office of Performance and Quality. OIG did not independently verify the data. Lawful permanent residents, also known as "green card" holders, are noncitizens who are lawfully

authorized to live permanently within the United States. Certain permanent residents who are married to U.S. citizens and have evidence of continuous residency are eligible for naturalization after 3 years instead of the normally required 5 years as a permanent resident applying for citizenship. In addition, certain persons with qualifying military service may be eligible to apply for naturalization without any period of continuous residence in the United States. See USCIS, "I am Married to a U.S. Citizen" at <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learn-about-citizenship/citizenship-and-naturalization/i-am-married-to-a-us-citizen> and "Naturalization Through Military Service" at <https://www.uscis.gov/military/naturalization-through-military-service>, respectively. In addition, a person must demonstrate that he or she is of good moral character and has been a person of good moral character for 5 years preceding filing Form N-400, Application for Naturalization, as well as take an Oath of Allegiance to the United States. See USCIS, "I am a Lawful Permanent Resident of 5 Years," at <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learn-about-citizenship/citizenship-and-naturalization/i-am-a-lawful-permanent-resident-of-5-years>. See 8 U.S.C. Chapter 12, "Immigration and Nationality."

²⁵ 8 U.S.C. § 1427, "Requirements of naturalization."

²⁶ AUD-MERO-22-38, September 2022, page 28.

²⁷ Certain Afghan nationals at risk who are granted humanitarian parole into the United States are eligible for the Department's Afghan Placement and Assistance Program. The purpose of the program is to provide certain Afghans provided parole with initial relocation services for 30 to 90 days after arrival in the United States.

²⁸ OIG, *Review of Challenges in the Afghan Placement and Assistance Program* (ESP-23-01, March 2023).

²⁹ PRM's migration from the Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System to START began in October 2020 and ended with the Resettlement Support Center Middle East and North Africa's transition to START in December 2021.