



Questions and Answers for Refugee Processing National Stakeholder Engagement March 15, 2023, 2-3 p.m. Eastern

Background

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) conducted a national stakeholder engagement on March 15, 2023, on refugee processing. Please note that some of the stakeholder questions below may have been revised for clarity.

Q1) At the last quarterly engagement [in December 2022], USCIS said it is working to “consider climate change factors as part of the refugee adjudication.” Could you please share more about these efforts? Who is leading this for USCIS, and would it be possible for stakeholders to have a meeting with USCIS to engage on this issue.

Response:

We know there has been an interest in our work on climate change initiatives. At this time, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate (RAIO) has participated in inter-agency meetings and discussions related to [Executive Order 14013](#) Section 6 on climate change. RAIO is currently reviewing our training materials to identify the intersection of climate change with existing refugee/asylum standards. We also intend to schedule climate change related lectures by subject-matter experts for RAIO employees and officers.

Q2) Please provide data on refugee cases referred to the Department of Homeland Security from the Department of State for interview. How many cases have been interviewed? How many interviewed cases are pending, disaggregated by stage?

Response:

The refugee ceiling for FY23 is 125,000. Currently, there are about 45,000 pre-USCIS individuals in the pipeline who have completed the Resettlement Support Centers (RSC) prescreening. There are approximately 113,000 individuals in the pipeline who have completed their USCIS interview, but require further action by either USCIS, the Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), or the RSCs before a decision is made and possible admission to the United States.

Q3) Please describe the ways in which partnering with the U.S. Digital Service and the Refugee Coordination Center has led to the increase in refugee arrivals.

Response:

U.S. Digital Service and the Refugee Coordination Center (RCC), operating as an interagency group, have helped untangle complex challenges that impact arrival numbers. They work directly with and alongside colleagues across PRM and USCIS to solve problems, accelerate data, align technology priorities and highlight process inefficiencies. Some key projects that have directly contributed to refugee arrivals have included:

- a. USRAP Workload Prioritization: A project where they convened the Refugee Processing Center (RPC) and USCIS to identify emerging USRAP priorities, adjust



- prioritization logic, and implement the updates across major USRAP workflows. This work helped align various work occurring across the program to ensure coordination and collaboration on cases.
- b. **Eliminating Case History:** A project where the team worked to eliminate the RSC Case History for P1 cases that have a UNHCR RRF on file. This helps streamline the interview process, reduce unnecessary redundancy, and free up time for case workers—contributing to a more efficient process for adjudicating cases.
 - c. **Centralized tools for RSC Projections:** RCC, in collaboration with USDS, created a centralized tool that is used for projections across RSCs and USRAP to better inform the program on resourcing needs and case flow optimization.
 - d. **Pipeline Dashboard:** RCC, in collaboration with USDS, created a joint pipeline dashboard that identifies each step of the case flow process and highlights areas that need more attention and focus to more efficiently process refugees.

Q4) What is the average processing time for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) cases currently in the pipeline?

Response:

The RCC reports that the average processing time for USRAP cases is approximately four years. The average refugee processing time has been decreasing through our recent collaborative efforts between RCC, RSCs, and the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, and USCIS to address backlog cases.

Q5) How many refugees and parolees have entered the U.S. through the Central American Minors (CAM) Program since March 2021? Please specify for Phase 1 versus Phase 2.

Response:

Since the restart of the CAM program in March 2021, there have been 338 CAM Refugee Phase 1 arrivals, and 6 CAM Refugee Phase 2 arrivals. There have been 424 CAM Phase 1 Parole arrivals, and 1 CAM Phase 2 Parole arrival.

Q6) How many CAM Program interviews were conducted in FY22 and the first quarter of FY23? What is your projected number of interviews for CAM in FY23? Please share the rate of refugee approved, parole approved, refugee denied, and parole denied.

Response:

In FY 2022, USCIS conducted approximately 1,000 initial interviews of individuals in the CAM program and recommended 360 of them for parole. From the start of FY23 to March 9, 2023, we interviewed 379 new CAM cases. From the start of FY23 to March 9, 2023, 249 CAM cases have arrived in the United States and 143 more have been referred for their USCIS interview.

It is difficult for USCIS to anticipate how many more CAM cases will take place this fiscal year, as our referral numbers only include those who have been accepted into the CAM program. There are other pending CAM cases whose acceptance is contingent upon further steps by RSC Latin America and PRM, and those are not counted as referrals until all steps have been completed.



We do plan to continue to interview CAM cases in each quarter this fiscal year. Overall, we have approved 31% of CAM cases for refugee status in Q1 of this fiscal year. We have recommended 66% for parole and denied 3% for both refugee and parole.

Q7) How many Afghan P2 cases have been referred for interview and how many have received an interview?

Response:

Since FY 2021 and as of March 7, 2023: 635 Afghan P2 cases have been interviewed. An additional 23 Afghan P2 cases have completed prescreening and are pending their USCIS interview.

Q8) How many Afghans have been interviewed by USCIS as part of the expedited refugee processing model at Camp As Sayliyah (CAS)? How many have been granted, denied, and are still pending? What happens to those who are denied? What are the other top areas where you are interviewing Afghans?

Response:

USCIS began conducting Afghan refugee processing in Qatar at Camp As Sayliyah (CAS) in March 2022 with the goal of completing processing by USCIS and our partners within 30 days wherever possible. As of March 7, 2023, USCIS has interviewed over 2,700 Afghan nationals at CAS. For cases currently at CAS in March 2023, we have granted 71% of all cases and 27% of cases are still pending. Of all applicants interviewed at CAS since we began in March 2022, 58% have arrived in the United States. Outside of CAS in Qatar, we have also continued processing Afghan nationals in countries worldwide, most heavily in UAE, Albania, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Turkey, Tajikistan, and Poland, as well as in smaller numbers in other locations.

Q9) Will any current or future refugee officers be reassigned as asylum officers to conduct credible fear screenings or asylum adjudications (if so, how many and when)?

Response:

We do not anticipate the reassignment of refugee officers to conduct asylum interviews at this time.

Q10) Please describe how USCIS plans on spending the funds Congress appropriated for processing in FY23. Please describe what, if any, the effect of not getting those same funds in FY24 will be.

Response:

The FY 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act provided \$133.4M in appropriations to address all aspects of the International and Refugee Affairs Division (IRAD) operational mission (this amount also covers 26 FDNS positions and five HQ RAIO positions). This made IRAD fully funded through appropriations. Appropriated funding can only be used to support Refugee and International Operations, which includes all work associated with refugee adjudications (such as: Circuit Ride Travel; Interdiction screenings (PSO); I-730 Refugee/Asylee Relative Petitions;



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Public Engagement Division

I-290B Notice of Appeal or Motion; Refugee Travel Documents; Family Reunification Programs; Training for above workloads; data management, analysis, and reporting in support of above workloads; mission support or administrative work supporting the above workloads, such as budget, hiring and staffing, facilities, records, personal property management, emergency management, and reporting); operation of International Offices; and the Humanitarian Parole Program.

For FY 2024, the President's Budget requests \$137.4M for IRAD to continue the aforementioned workloads. Not receiving these appropriated funds in FY 2024 would be detrimental to the humanitarian mission. USCIS would be required to move forward with charging higher costs to fee-paying applicants and petitioners for immigration benefits. This would place the burden of these humanitarian costs, which are done without fee, on the backs of individuals seeking immigration benefits.

Q11) How many refugee corps officers, including supervisors, are on board and how many positions are vacant? What was your attrition rate in FY22? What about so far in FY23?

Response:

At the end of Q1, 84% of our 285 authorized adjudicative officer positions were filled. USCIS will continue to actively hire and bring on board new officers throughout this fiscal year. USCIS routinely recruits above our vacancy levels in order to account for attrition and drop-outs during pre-onboarding processes, such as medical and security clearances. IRAD does not track formal attrition rates, but in Q1 we increased predictability associated with overseas travel, which we know is important for officer work-life balance. Recent changes to how we schedule circuit rides allow officers to anticipate time overseas and time stateside throughout the fiscal year as previous unpredictability in schedule had contributed to attrition.

Q12) I am a Syrian citizen residing in Iraqi Kurdistan. I want to emigrate and resettle.

Response:

For the USRAP, you must receive a referral to be considered for resettlement by USCIS. Cases such as yours are most frequently identified and referred to the program by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a United States Embassy, or a designated non-governmental organization (NGO). If you have not already, we would recommend you register yourself and your family members as refugees with UNCHR as a first step to resettlement. UNHCR refers cases to our resettlement program and will be able to provide you with important information regarding worldwide refugee processing. For more information, please see our [website](#). You can find more information on how to register with UNHCR in Iraq on their [website](#).



Q13: Regarding the Iraqi and Syrian I-130 P2 Direct Access Program, what is the USCIS process in determining eligibility for expedited processing?

Response:

Getting access to the USRAP is not grounds to expedite adjudication of an application. However, if there are individual circumstances to expedite adjudication, and a request to expedite the I-130 has been submitted, USCIS will consider the specific grounds to expedite in deciding whether to prioritize that petitioner above other pending I-130 petitioners. The petitioner would follow the general expedite request process on the USCIS website. This applies to petitioners requesting an I-130 expedite prior to the beneficiary seeking access to the Iraqi and Syrian I-130 P2 Direct Access Program. For more information on expedites, please refer to our website.

Q14) We understand that as of September 30, 2022, there were approximately 870 Form I-590 Priority-3 (P3) applicants who had completed interviews and were pending USCIS adjudication or RSC administrative processing.

Response:

Currently, there are 632 Priority-3 applicants in the active pipeline who have completed their USCIS interviews and are pending USCIS adjudication. There are 424 additional post-USCIS applicants in the pipeline who have received decisions.

Q15) USCIS mentioned that circuit rides would have a combination of trained and new staff on each circuit rides. Has this started? Please describe any benefits or advantages due to this change.

Response:

As a final step in their training, all adjudicative staff assigned to refugee processing complete interview training on an overseas circuit ride. It has been our practice to have both officers-in-training and experienced officers on the same circuit ride. A benefit of this is that experienced officers are able to assist with interviews if a new officer is delayed or handle more complex cases as needed. This is not a change in practice for our agency.

Q16) How many circuit rides and interviews are taking place in FY23, broken down by quarter? What is the duration of these circuit rides? How many interview slots do you estimate will be used for pending family reunification cases?

Response:

USCIS plans to continue to increase refugee interviews in every quarter of this year.

- In Q1, we sent 173 officers to 28 overseas locations and interviewed over 19,000 individuals.
- In Q2, we plan to send 221 officers to 37 countries to interview approximately 22,700 individuals.
- Tentative plans for Q3 include deploying over 260 officers to more than 40 countries to conduct over 26,000 interviews.
- And tentative Q4 plans include deploying over 270 officers to over 45 countries to conduct over 28,000 interviews.



- Generally, these trips are between six and eight weeks in duration. We are unable to estimate how many interview slots will be used for pending family reunification cases in FY23.

Q17) Could you please provide an update on backlog reduction efforts? How many long-standing cases has USCIS been able to resolve since this initiative began?

Response:

Since the beginning of the fiscal year, USRAP has resolved approximately 6,300 total applicants from our backlog of cases referred before FY2018 (resolved means either arrived in the U.S. as a refugee or administratively closed). Additionally, about 30% of the backlog population has moved forward in the process. As part of backlog reduction efforts, we are conducting ongoing initiatives in the Africa and Middle East/North Africa (MENA) regions to convene all USRAP partners to finalize adjudication on longstanding cases in our pipeline.

Q18) In previous stakeholder engagements, we learned that USCIS/PRM are planning on replicating or semi-replicating the expedited refugee processing /co-location model used at CAS in other locations. Can you provide an update on the status of these operations and what you foresee with this processing model for FY23?

Response:

Based on a model designed by/with the Refugee Coordination Center (RCC) – a White House initiative with assistance from U.S. Digital Services – and in coordination with PRM, USCIS began implementing concurrent processing in 4 locations to reduce start-to-finish processing times. Concurrent processing means steps that normally take place sequentially, such as medical exams or assurances with resettlement agencies, can take place at the same time as other steps, including the USCIS interview and finalization of our decision. It also implements a unified prioritization logic between resettlement partner workloads to increase efficiencies and reduce redundancies. In Q1, we used the concurrent processing model in Guatemala, Turkey, Malaysia, and Tanzania. Across all concurrent processing sites, about half of USCIS decisions were made within 30 days of the USCIS interview. Concurrent processing was particularly successful in Tanzania where 93% of applicants interviewed by USCIS in the first quarter received a final USCIS decision within 30 days of their interview date. In Q2, USCIS continued concurrent processing in Guatemala, Tanzania, Turkey, and Malaysia and expanded the model to Burundi, Chad, Ecuador, El Salvador, Rwanda, and Uganda. We will continue to expand application of the concurrent processing model to additional locations, where possible.

Q19) Regarding the Iraqi and Syrian I-130 P2 Direct Access Program, family reunification program, we have encountered a number of issues pertaining to access. To access this program and USRAP processing, the I-130 must first be approved by USCIS. At the initial I-130 adjudication stage, cases eligible for P2 DAP are not being identified. This requires individuals to proactively request an expedite in processing. However, USCIS consistently denies these expedite requests leaving cases to remain in the normal processing queue in their visa category - for many cases 10-16 years.



- **Q19a: By whom and when in the process is a case identified as I-130 P2 Direct Access Program eligible?**

Response:

The P-2 Direct Access Program for Iraqi and Syrian beneficiaries of Form I-130 Petition for Alien Relative is an avenue for Iraqis and Syrians to apply for refugee resettlement in the United States through the USRAP. It is available to approved I-130 beneficiaries of Iraqi or Syrian nationality and their derivatives. The I-130 petition must be approved by USCIS before a beneficiary becomes eligible to apply for refugee resettlement through this program. If and when the petition is approved by USCIS, the I-130 beneficiary and their derivatives (if any) become eligible for access to USRAP. The Department of State's Refugee Processing Center contacts beneficiaries once the I-130 petition is approved by USCIS, after verification that it meets eligibility requirements set forth by PRM.

- **Q19b: Historically, USCIS approved requests for expedited processing based on demonstrated eligibility for I-130 P2 Direct Access Program. However, in the past three years, USCIS began to progressively deny more and more of those requests. Currently, the consistent response is denial. Is the I-130 P2 Direct Access Program an approved expedite category?**

Response:

When adjudicating an I-130 expedite request, USCIS may factor in whether the beneficiary is accessing the refugee program, but it is not the sole or only factor that may be considered. The petitioner should provide specific reasons and other evidence for the USCIS expedite criteria. For more information on expedites, please refer to our [website](#). In order to qualify for resettlement as a refugee, the beneficiary and any derivatives included on the beneficiary's case are interviewed by USCIS. The I-130 beneficiary, who becomes the "principal applicant" on the refugee case, must demonstrate that he/she meets the U.S. refugee definition, namely that he/she is unable or unwilling to return to the country of citizenship because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion; is not firmly resettled in a foreign country; and is otherwise admissible to the United States. All derivatives included on the case must also be admissible to the United States. All applicants must also clear all required security checks.