

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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By ESEC at 3:39 pm, Aug 26, 2022

August 26, 2022

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Secretary Blinken,

We write to express our concern at the slow pace of refugee resettlement and to request details about current and future plans to rebuild the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Resettlement Support Centers (RSCs) are projecting 25,000 refugee arrivals to the United States this fiscal year. This is drastically lower than the Presidential Determination of 125,000 and less than half of the 65,000 operational capacity planned for this year. This results in very real impacts on the lives of refugees around the world awaiting resettlement, and on their loved ones already resettled in the United States.

The need for robust refugee resettlement is high. If current conflict trends continue, the twenty-first century will be defined by an ever-rising population of people forced to flee their homes and by increasingly limited options for them to turn to. This spring, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declared a grim milestone: there are currently 100 million forcibly displaced people globally. Based on new global trends, more than 26 million of those people are refugees. More than two million refugees are in need of resettlement. At this critical moment for refugees around the world, the U.S.'s moral and legal obligation to our longstanding, bipartisan refugee resettlement program has never been more important.

We welcomed Executive Order (EO14013) on rebuilding and enhancing programs to resettle refugees in February 2021, which was desperately needed to address the harm inflicted on the program by the previous administration. This Administration has faced significant challenges in this work, including the numerous discriminatory policies enacted by the previous Administration, the implications of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to evacuate over 70,000 Afghans through Operation Allies Welcome. However, we note that the number of refugees in the USRAP pipeline has declined from 90,000 in September 2021 to only 77,931 as of June 7, 2022.

Through your leadership of this interagency effort, we urge you to rapidly adjudicate refugee cases, in particular family reunification cases; to prioritize the implementation of reforms outlined in Executive Order 14013; and to collaborate substantively with Congress and with the refugee resettlement agencies to increase the pace of this work. In this context, we respectfully request your responses to the following questions.

1. What is the average processing time for USRAP cases currently in the pipeline?
2. 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?
3. Please provide the total number of family reunification petitioners, separated into Follow-to-Join and Priority-3 applicants.
 - How many cases are pending interviews? What is the length of time that each case has been pending?
 - How many cases have completed interviews?
 4. The FY23 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) provided an operational capacity figure of 65,000 arrivals next fiscal year. Will that number be adjusted based on the FY23 Presidential Determination, and if so in what direction?
 5. Does USCIS have refugee processing circuit rides planned for the remainder of FY22?
 - If so, will circuit rides include interviews for pending family reunification cases?
 6. Please describe the status of planning for refugee processing circuit rides for FY23.
 - How many are planned for the first quarter of FY23, and what is their duration?
 - Will these circuit rides include interviews for pending family reunification cases?
 7. How many refugee corps officers has United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) hired since January 2022?
 8. Please describe the status of USCIS plans to reopen international offices.
 9. Has the U.S. Digital Services deployed staff to lead coordination for resettlement rebuilding? If so, please provide information on such individuals.
 10. Has the National Vetting Center (NVC) assumed a role in refugee vetting?
 - If so, has this impacted the speed of vetting?
 - Please describe the oversight measures in place to ensure the NVC improves the efficiency of refugee processing.
 11. How many Afghans have been processed to the United States as part of the expedited refugee processing model to date?
 - What are the projections of Afghan refugee arrivals for the remainder of FY22?
 - Of projected arrivals for the remainder of FY22, how many are projected to arrive via the expedited model?
 12. Please describe the status of plans to expand the expedited refugee processing model to other regions, including RSC Africa's implementation of this model.
 13. How many Ukrainians and non-Ukrainian residents of Ukraine are projected to arrive in FY22 as refugees?
 - How many Lautenberg cases are in the USRAP pipeline?

- How many have been closed as a result of pending Lautenberg individuals who have arrived as U4U beneficiaries?

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to your response.


Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



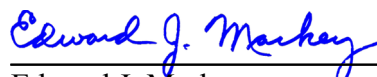
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



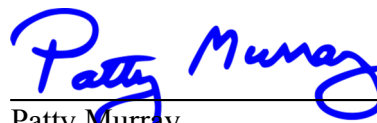
Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator




Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



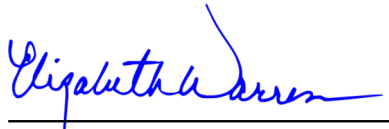
Patty Murray
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

January 11, 2023

The Honorable Benjamin Cardin
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cardin:

Thank you for your August 26, 2022, letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Secretary Mayorkas asked that I respond on his behalf, and I apologize for the delay in my response.

DHS and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) share your commitment to increasing refugee admissions so that the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) truly reflects America's values as a nation that welcomes and supports refugees. USCIS maintains a longstanding, strong relationship with the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), and together, we are working to rebuild the USRAP.

To that end, USRAP has increased refugee interviews and admissions, which had been delayed in recent years, in particular by the COVID pandemic. This includes building a robust circuit ride schedule that maintains safety for USCIS officers, Resettlement Support Center staff, and refugee applicants.

In addition, U.S. Digital Service is now embedded in USRAP and has brought together an interagency team, known as the Refugee Coordination Center (RCC), to address critical issues for the program. Both USCIS and PRM staff are detailed full time to this effort. This robust and successful partnership that has already begun to implement process improvements such as data-informed pipeline management, which allows partners to move cases through the pipeline through regular meetings and consistent data and reporting, and concurrent – as opposed to sequential – processing steps to decrease the amount of time between pipeline stages. RCC continues to review pipeline steps to identify bottlenecks and improve operational efficiencies in multiple areas.

USCIS has also significantly advanced hiring efforts to increase capacity to process refugee applicants. USCIS has prioritized hiring of staff to support the USRAP, including leveraging direct hire authority. Expedient use of regular hiring authorities has facilitated the rapid growth of refugee adjudications staff, which has more than doubled to meet the needs of increased refugee processing. With the additional 320 appropriated positions provided by Congress, once fully staffed, there will be an overall workforce of over 650 USCIS headquarters

The Honorable Benjamin Cardin

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and field employees supporting the USRAP. As of November 30, 2022, we have about 513 staff onboard with additional selections pending pre-employment clearances.

Our responses to your enclosed questions further highlight the work being done to grow the USRAP.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. The cosigners of your letter will receive separate, identical responses. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (240) 721-3801.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ur M. Jaddou", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ur M. Jaddou
Director

**The Department of Homeland Security's Response to
Senator Benjamin L. Cardin's August 26, 2022 Letter**

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

USCIS defers to Department of State's (DOS) Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) as the overall manager of the USRAP, for this information.

2. Please provide data on refugee cases referred to the Department of Homeland Security from the Department of State for interview.

There are approximately 48,000 individuals who have completed pre-screening and are pending interview with USCIS. Of those 48,000, approximately 12,000 individuals have been pending for 12 months or more. About 35 percent of those 12,000 individuals fall within the Iraqi P-2 program, which has been temporarily suspended, while about 10 percent are located in areas USCIS is currently unable to access due to security concerns.

• How many cases have been interviewed?

As of September 30, 2022, USCIS completed initial interviews for over 44,000 refugee applicants and re-interviews for over 3,500 refugee applicants in FY 2022. This includes in-person interviews conducted abroad and video interviews conducted from the United States.

• How many interviewed cases are pending, disaggregated by stage?

As of September 30, 2022, there were approximately 103,000 applicants who had completed a USCIS interview but were pending further security checks, adjudicative action, or out-processing for travel to the United States.¹

Post-USCIS Interview Case Stage	Approximate Number of Individuals
USCIS adjudicative or Resettlement Support Center (RSC) administrative processing and/or security checks required	75,900
USCIS fully approved, awaiting partner out-processing for travel	23,000
USCIS fully approved, completed all required processing steps, and are ready for departure to US	4,100
Total	103,000

3. Please provide the total number of family reunification petitioners, separated into Follow-to-Join Refugee and Priority-3 applicants.

• How many cases are pending interviews? What is the length of time that each case has been pending?

¹ Note that USCIS tracks this data in individuals not cases, so data reflects individuals.

The Department of Homeland Security's Response to Senator Benjamin L. Cardin's August 26, 2022 Letter

Forms I-730, Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition:

As of September 30, 2022, there were approximately 2,800 Form I-730 follow-to-join refugee petitions pending interview and additional processing abroad with USCIS and the DOS Bureau of Consular Affairs. Of those, approximately 1,000 petitions were pending with USCIS offices abroad, and the rest were pending with DOS. Additionally, as of September 30, 2022, there were approximately 5,500 Form I-730 follow-to-join refugee petitions that had been received by USCIS and were pending initial domestic processing.^{2,3}

Regarding the length of time each Form I-730 follow-to-join refugee petition has been pending, USCIS currently publishes Form I-730 case processing times for initial domestic processing of Form I-730 follow-to-join asylee (FTJ-A) petitions. As of November 30, 2022, Form I-730 FTJ-A petitions being processed by the Nebraska Service Center are estimated to be processed in 13 months and Form I-730 FTJ-A petitions being processed at the Texas Service Center are estimated to be processed in 22.5 months.⁴

USCIS is working to expand the information on Form I-730 processing times beyond the information currently on the USCIS processing times website to include follow-to-join refugee processing times, and to provide a more holistic picture of Form I-730 processing times in the future.⁵ Currently there is no centralized case management system or system of records that tracks this level of data in a manner that can be easily reported. USCIS is also working to reduce Form I-730 processing times, which were greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of the USCIS Refugee, Asylum and International Operations Directorate's (RAIO) International Operations Division and most of the USCIS international offices.⁶

Form I-590, Registration for Classification as Refugee, Priority-3 Applicants

USCIS defers to DOS for this information.

- **How many cases have completed interviews?**

Forms I-730, Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition:

² The USCIS Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate (RAIO) generated the statistics for this request. Data used to generate these statistics are based on data entered in multiple U.S. government systems, including the Computer Linked Application Information Management System (CLAIMS 3), the Case and Activity Management for International Operations System (CAMINO), and RAIO's case management system, Global. The data are accurate as of October 13, 2022, unless otherwise noted. These data represent working statistics from the field and have not been validated for external distribution or public use.

³ Additional information regarding the distinct stages of Form I-730 processing can be found on the [USCIS Form I-730 webpage](#).

⁴ USCIS case processing time information is located on the USCIS website: <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/>. The information provided is current as of November 30, 2022.

⁵ The [USCIS processing times website](#) presently displays initial domestic processing times for Forms I-730 follow-to-join asylee petitions only. Initial domestic processing of Forms I-730 follow-to-join asylee petitions is conducted by the Texas and Nebraska Service Centers.

⁶ Note, this language is taken from comments made by RAIO Associate Director Ted Kim during the July 21, 2022 USCIS National Engagement on Form I-730 Refugee/Asylee Follow-to-Join Processing.

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Senator Benjamin L. Cardin's August 26, 2022 Letter**

As of September 30, 2022, there were approximately 2,800 Form I-730 follow-to-join refugee petitions that were either pending interview or additional processing abroad. Interviews for Form I-730 beneficiaries are conducted by either USCIS or DOS, depending on where the beneficiary is located. Of those 2,800, approximately 1,000 petitions are pending with USCIS offices abroad, and the rest are pending with DOS. Of those petitions pending with USCIS offices abroad, approximately 300 had beneficiary interviews completed in FY 2022. USCIS defers to DOS to provide the number of cases pending at DOS posts that have completed interviews in FY 2022.

Form I-590, Registration for Classification as Refugee, Priority-3 Applicants:

As of September 30, 2022, there were approximately 870 Form I-590 Priority-3 applicants who had completed interviews and were pending USCIS adjudicative or RSC administrative processing.

4. The FY23 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) provided an operational capacity figure of 65,000 arrivals next fiscal year. Will that number be adjusted based on the FY23 Presidential Determination, and if so in what direction?

USCIS defers to DOS for this information.

5. Does USCIS have refugee processing circuit rides planned for the remainder of FY22?

In FY 2022 Quarter 4, USCIS deployed processing teams on 26 circuit rides to 36 countries. Overall, during FY 2022, USCIS deployed refugee processing teams on 72 circuit rides to 47 countries and reached applicants in 61 countries through the additional use of video-teleconferencing.

• If so, will circuit rides include interviews for pending family reunification cases?

During FY 2022 Quarter 4, Priority 3 family reunification cases were interviewed in multiple locations. USCIS international office staff also continued to interview Form I-730 follow-to-join refugee cases where they had jurisdiction, such as in Nairobi.

6. Please describe the status of planning for refugee processing circuit rides for FY23.

USCIS and PRM are actively working together, with support from the Refugee Coordination Center, on a plan for circuit rides in FY 2023, starting with Q1 and Q2. While Q1 circuit rides are underway, USCIS continues to work with PRM to create a schedule for Q2.

• How many are planned for the first quarter of FY23, and what is their duration?

In FY 2023 Q1, USCIS will deploy 200 staff on 27 refugee processing circuit rides to 34 countries. Refugee processing circuit rides vary in duration depending on location. The shortest circuit ride in Q1 is 40 days, the longest circuit ride is currently 68 days.

**The Department of Homeland Security's Response to
Senator Benjamin L. Cardin's August 26, 2022 Letter**

- **Will these circuit rides include interviews for pending family reunification cases?**

USCIS will continue to interview Priority 3 family reunification refugee cases and Form I-730 follow-to-join refugee cases in multiple circuit ride locations in FY 2023.

7. How many refugee corps officers has United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) hired since January 2022?

USCIS has made great strides toward our refugee officer hiring goals, including onboarding 169 refugee officers and first-line supervisory refugee officers since January 2022. As of the end of fiscal year 2022, we have about 304 officers and first-line supervisors onboard (76 percent of authorized positions), with additional selections pending pre-employment clearances. Onboard numbers fluctuate frequently as selectees clear and are approved to enter on duty. We continue to actively recruit for these critical positions to build a pipeline of qualified candidates, accounting for lead times for medical and security clearances and training requirements, as well as projected attrition and internal advancement.

In accordance with Executive Orders 14010 and 14013, USCIS and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) are working together to recruit refugee officers using direct hiring authority (DHA), which OPM granted to USCIS on April 19, 2022, based on our critical hiring needs, allowing us to hire qualified applicants more quickly. OPM's grant of DHA for USCIS included selections for 200 refugee officers.

8. Please describe the status of USCIS plans to reopen international offices.

USCIS recently completed a comprehensive international footprint analysis. The analysis includes feedback from stakeholder interviews with the Department of Homeland Security, DOS, Department of Defense, CIS Ombudsman's office, and several USCIS internal stakeholders. USCIS also informally consulted with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As part of that analysis, USCIS considered locations where USCIS presence would support expanding USCIS' humanitarian mission, including support for the USRAP. USCIS is consulting with the Department of State on the viability of opening additional offices in multiple locations in the coming two years.

For example, in October 2022, USCIS received DOS approval to re-open a permanent USCIS office at Embassy, Havana, Cuba, staffed by two U.S. Direct Hire employees. USCIS will begin recruiting for those positions and take the necessary steps to open a permanent office.

9. Has the U.S. Digital Services (USDS) deployed staff to lead coordination for resettlement rebuilding? If so, please provide information on such individuals.

The USDS team played a significant role in getting USRAP processing off-the-ground in Camp As Sayliyah (CAS) in Doha, Qatar. They assessed how refugee applicants could be processed through the USRAP within the 30-day limit agreed to with the government of Qatar. The USDS team continues to assist the program in analyzing current and historical USRAP data and reviewing technical systems.

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10. Has the National Vetting Center (NVC) assumed a role in refugee vetting?

- **If so, has this impacted the speed of vetting?**
- **Please describe the oversight measures in place to ensure the NVC improves the efficiency of refugee processing.**

The National Vetting Center (NVC) provides a faster and more complete platform for vetting refugee applicants. NVC centralized and improved processes to more efficiently and effectively inform department and agency vetting. The NVC began vetting refugee cases in March 2022. The NVC fills a critical need by improving how U.S. Government officials identify individuals who may present a threat to national security. Over time, the U.S. Government has developed multiple, unconnected processes to bring together threat information already lawfully held by the government about individuals seeking to enter the United States or to obtain benefits under immigration laws. The NVC consolidates relevant information from multiple partners and makes it accessible in a timely manner to departments and agencies. The NVC has several capabilities in place to monitor in near real time issues or outages that affect vetting and processing times. The NVC alerts USCIS and all of the partners if there are any delays in response times. The NVC also provides USCIS the ability to closely track the refugee vetting requests within the NVC process, including access to a daily metrics board and real time monitoring.

11. How many Afghans have been processed to the United States as part of the expedited refugee processing model to date?

USCIS interprets this to refer to refugee processing at CAS. As of September 30, 2022, approximately 900 refugee applicants processed at CAS have arrived in the United States as refugees.

- **What are the projections of Afghan refugee arrivals for the remainder of FY22?**

In FY 2022, 1,618 Afghan nationals were admitted to the United States as refugees.

- **Of projected arrivals for the remainder of FY22, how many are projected to arrive via the expedited model?**

See previous answer above.

12. Please describe the status of plans to expand the expedited refugee processing model to other regions, including RSC Africa's implementation of this model.

Refugee processing at CAS in Doha, Qatar provided a unique opportunity to explore expedited refugee processing, which has required support from several other United States Government Departments and Agencies along with International Organization for Migration (IOM). There are elements of CAS processing that USCIS has initiated elsewhere, such as increasing the processing steps that happen concurrently, rather than sequentially. USCIS, along with DOS, is exploring concurrent processing in other locations including Istanbul, Turkey; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Makere, Tanzania; and Guatemala City, Guatemala.

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13. How many Ukrainians and non-Ukrainian residents of Ukraine are projected to arrive in FY22 as refugees?

In FY 2022, 1,610 Ukrainians had been admitted to the United States as refugees. USCIS defers to PRM for information on non-Ukrainian residents of Ukraine.

- **How many Lautenberg cases are in the USRAP pipeline?**

As of October 4, 2022, there were almost 6,500 Ukrainian Lautenberg cases representing over 17,400 individuals in the USRAP pipeline. Of these pipeline cases, over 13,000 have not yet been scheduled for a USCIS interview.

As of December 1, 2022, there were over almost 13,000 Lautenberg cases of all nationalities representing over 30,500 individuals in the USRAP pipeline. Of these pipeline cases, over 11,400 have not yet been scheduled for a USCIS interview.

- **How many have been closed as a result of pending Lautenberg individuals who have arrived as U4U beneficiaries?**

USCIS is unable to provide this information. This specific case closure reason is not systematically tracked and available for reporting. However, as of October 2022, USCIS estimates that there were approximately 3,500 Ukrainian Lautenberg applicants who have been paroled into the United States under the Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) program. This figure is an approximation derived from comparing the biographic information of Form I-590 Ukrainian Lautenberg applicants with that of U4U beneficiaries.