

USCIS Refugee Processing Quarterly Stakeholder Engagement

December 7, 2022

Pre-submitted Questions

Note: Some of the questions below may have been revised to provide clarification.

Q1) Regarding International Offices, can you please speak more about this and share when/where?

Response:

USCIS is considering expanding our international footprint by opening new USCIS offices where appropriate. This past fiscal year, we conducted a comprehensive international footprint analysis, including stakeholder interviews with Department of Homeland Security, Department of State, Department of Defense, CIS Ombudsman's office, and several USCIS internal stakeholders. We also informally consulted with UNHCR. As part of that analysis, we looked for locations where we could provide support for the expansion of USCIS' humanitarian mission, including support for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. We are in discussions with the Department of State on the viability of opening additional USCIS offices in numerous locations around the world. Several factors may affect the Department of State's decisions regarding our recommendations, including their ability to support our staff, security on the ground, and permission of the host government. At this stage, it is too early in the process to announce proposed locations, but we look forward to sharing more information with you when we can.

Q2) Is USCIS (or the government in general) developing a pathway for private sponsorship of all refugees (not just Ukrainians)? If so, will it only apply to refugees the U.S. has already accepted or all refugees registered with UNHCR?

Response:

The Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) program provides a pathway for Ukrainian citizens and their immediate family members who are outside the United States to come to the United States and stay temporarily in a two-year period of parole authorized by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Ukrainians participating in U4U must have a supporter in the United States who agrees to provide them with financial support for the duration of their stay in the United States. The USCIS Uniting for Ukraine website has details about that parole program, and the website will be posted in the chat.

U4U beneficiaries do not receive refugee status and are not authorized to stay permanently in the United States. By contrast, Ukrainians who are referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program receive an interview by a USCIS officer to determine their eligibility for refugee resettlement and admissibility to the United States. If approved, they will be sponsored by a U.S. resettlement agency.

Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration is developing a pilot program for private sponsorship of refugees. State can provide additional information about this program.

Q3) We are grateful to see the USCIS Refugee Access Verification Unit (RAVU) letters resume. Please advise of the review process so far. Is there sufficient staffing? Can you speak to Refugee Access Verification Unit operations and processing Priority 3 refugee referrals and Central American Minors (CAM) Program cases, and how those operations are improving or slowing P-3 and CAM processing?

Response:

The purpose of the USCIS Refugee Access Verification Unit (RAVU) is to track and manage the review of Affidavits of Relationship (AORs) filed by immediate family members, or as anchor relatives, in the United States on behalf of overseas family members who seek consideration for refugee resettlement under the Priority 3 Family Reunification Program. Decisions are going out. We're also actively working on additional tools that will allow for increased processing and expedited RAVU notification in FY 2023. Staffing for RAVU has been sufficient. While staffing fluctuates based on the circuit ride schedule, we have been able to meet targets and ensure that all cases scheduled for interview have completed RAVU to avoid any cases requiring de-scheduling from the circuit rides.

As of Nov. 15, there were a total of 195 cases pending RAVU. Of those, only 50 are actionable while the other 145 are not ready for RAVU review. P-3 and CAM cases go through a multistep process to verify access and the ability to continue to the interview stage. The RAVU team reviews the information presented on the AOR (Form DS-7656 (P-3) or DS-7699 (CAM)) to compare information provided with the U.S.-based relative on prior immigration documents to verify claimed familial relationships. RAVU and DNA collection are integrity measures unique to P-3 and the CAM program.

Q4) The United States significantly expanded refugee resettlement from the region, including for Haitian, Venezuelan, and Nicaraguan nationals. How many circuit rides have occurred specifically for the Western Hemisphere? Can you outline your plan for increasing resettlement from those countries?

Response:

In FY22, USCIS completed 20 circuit rides in Latin American and the Caribbean. In Q1 FY23, we will complete 5 circuit rides in the region.

USCIS defers further response of this question to its Department of State counterpart, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM).

Q5) Regarding the Iraqi and Syrian I-130 P2 Direct Access Program, at the initial I-130 approval stage, USCIS appears to make no effort to expedite Iraqi or Syrian I-130s unless there is an expedite request which is often denied. However, to access this program and USRAP processing, the I-130 must first be approved. Can USCIS commit to improving training and establishing an I-130 expedite process for Iraqis and Syrians entering this program?

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. There's no specific, defined expedite process for I-130s in general. The petitioner would follow the expedite process on the USCIS website. This applies to Iraqi and Syrian I-130 P2 Direct Access Program. In the past, if a beneficiary registered with the U.S. refugee resettlement program as a P2 refugee, USCIS may consider the beneficiary's potential refugee status as a favorable factor and expedite the petition.

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Q7) We have seen increasing delays for refugees (resettled through USRAP) in receiving work authorization and social security cards. To what extent is USCIS working with PRM and other interagency partners to efficiently process EADs for refugees?

Response:

USCIS is aware of and exploring what we can do to address the delays issuing Employment Authorization Documents (EADs). We have also worked with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to provide them information to enable them to more expeditiously provide Social Security Cards for refugees. For refugees, we now send SSA information about the refugee as soon as USCIS has received the I-765 application. We are seeking other efficiencies to reduce manual processes and automate issuing EADs. We recognize that EAD cards are essential to obtaining employment and we are actively working on ways to more quickly approve refugee EADs.

Q8) What are the requirements for the new hiring staff? Do you have to have a permanent status to apply for a position [with] USCIS? Where are jobs posted?

Response:

You must be a U.S. citizen to apply for this position. You also must successfully pass a background investigation, including financial disclosure, and pass a U.S. Department of State medical exam and drug screening. Positions are announced on the USAJOBS website at the GS 9-12 levels. USCIS has recently developed additional content on its website to provide information regarding the refugee officer position and what it entails, along with a link to the USAJOBS website: [Exploring Refugee Officer Careers | USCIS](#). We encourage you to review this site for additional qualifications for an ideal candidate.

Q9) Do you have any special provision for Central American refugee applicants? More specific about Nicaraguan and Salvadorian citizens?

Response:

The Central American Minors (CAM) refugee and parole program provides an opportunity to apply for refugee status and possible resettlement in the United States to certain qualified children who are nationals of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, as well as certain family members of those children.

In addition, the Department of State and USCIS have supported refugee resettlement from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras through the Protection Transfer Arrangement (PTA), a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding among the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration, and the Government of Costa Rica (GOCR), which allows for the transfer of individuals with urgent protection concerns from their home countries in Northern Central America to Costa Rica for processing and resettlement to the United States and other third countries. In situations where there is

not such urgency, USCIS also interviews UNHCR-referred refugee applicants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in their home countries.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program accepts refugee referrals in the Western Hemisphere referred by UNHCR and partnering NGOs. We understand they are increasing referrals of Nicaraguans and Venezuelans this year. USCIS will interview cases once they have been accepted to the USRAP and pre-screened by Resettlement Support Centers, which operate under cooperative agreements with the Department of State.

Q10) Has the administration revisited its position on Uniting for Ukraine arrivals who are in the Lautenberg pipeline? We would recommend that Lautenberg eligible (pending or prospective) persons should be able to pursue refugee status under Lautenberg when they are in the US as parolees.

Response:

If an individual is physically present in the United States and wishes to seek protection because they have suffered persecution, or fear that they will suffer persecution, based on a protected ground, they may seek asylum by filing Form I-589, Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal (uscis.gov/i-589).

Q11) Is Global live from a USCIS resettlement processing perspective? Does USCIS still access WRAPS at all when processing refugees for resettlement?

Response:

Yes, Global is live for USCIS Form I-590 refugee resettlement processing; USCIS no longer uses WRAPS and has moved fully into Global for its refugee case management system. DOS has moved fully out of WRAPS into START. This has allowed USCIS to retire some of the older, more ad-hoc systems, such as the RAD Case Manager and R-Track.

Q12) It has been several years that there have been no refugee referrals made to the U.S. from Pakistan. What [is] the status of USCIS circuit rides in Pakistan?

Response:

USCIS defers the response of this question to its Department of State counterpart, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM).

Q13) How many cases are at each stage of the pipeline (i.e., referred, awaiting interview, awaiting reinterview, awaiting decision, received decision and waiting to travel)? Can you share the average length of time each case takes in each step of the USRAP process? And how long the clearance from each step lasts? For example, refugees' medical checks can expire while they are waiting for a decision from USCIS.

Response:

We provided statistics on the number of refugee applicants post-USCIS interview that are awaiting a USCIS decision, and the number approved by USCIS awaiting out processing and travel. In addition, there are another just over 200,000 refugee applicants pre-USCIS interview at various stages in the processing, and we will defer to State Department to answer any questions on refugee applicants pre-USCIS.

We are unable to provide at this time further information on the average length of each step. We realize there is a desire for greater transparency and information on the USRAP pipeline, including processing times, and we are developing new tools and systems to track and report in these areas. For example, we are actively working to develop reports that include processing times between various steps in the process. We are also working closely with RSCs to prioritize steps necessary for post-USCIS interviewed cases to avoid situations where, for example, medical checks expire while applicants await the post-interview steps.

Q14) Are there emergencies that can expedite a refugee's case processing (i.e., health emergency, separation from spouse or minor, etc.)? What are they, and how does a refugee apply for expediting?**Response:**

USCIS defers the response of this question to its Department of State counterpart, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM).

Q15) The most recent departures pipeline report indicates there is a small month-over-month growth to the "prescreen complete" and "USCIS refugee stamped" numbers. Are there any changes to processing or investments that will move these numbers significantly over the next months and years?**Response:**

USRAP partners are working to streamline efficiencies to more expeditiously move cases at all steps of the pipeline, while maintaining integrity in processing. These include:

1. **Data-informed pipeline management:** A focused coordination effort between PRM, USCIS, RSCs, the International Organization for Migration, UNHCR and other partners to move cases through the pipeline through regular meetings and consistent data and reporting.
2. **Concurrent processing:** Piloting a new process of scheduling certain USRAP tasks concurrently rather than sequentially to decrease the amount of time between pipeline stages
3. **Operational efficiencies:** Reviewing pipeline steps to identify bottlenecks and improve operational efficiencies in multiple areas, such as in the data collection and interview process.