



# HIGHLIGHTS

Office of Inspector General  
United States Department of State

AUD-MERO-20-35

## What OIG Reviewed

In 2009, Congress passed the Afghan Allies Protection Act, which established a special immigrant visa (SIV) program to resettle Afghans who were or are employed in Afghanistan by the U.S. Government or by the International Security Assistance Force and experienced an ongoing and serious threat as a result of their employment. Congress amended the Act in 2013 to improve the efficiency of the visa issuance process. From FY 2009 to FY 2019, 18,471 special immigrant visas were issued, and as of September 2019, 18,864 applicants remained in the process. The FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act directed the Department of State (Department), Office of Inspector General (OIG), to evaluate and offer improvements to eight identified obstacles that could affect the effective protection of Afghan allies through the SIV program and provide suggestions for improvements in future programs.

## What OIG Recommends

OIG made six recommendations in this report intended to improve the SIV program. On the basis of the Under Secretary for Management's response to a draft of this report, OIG considers one recommendation closed and five recommendations resolved, pending further action. A synopsis of management's comments and OIG's reply follow each recommendation in the Results section of this report. The Under Secretary for Management's response to a draft of this report is reprinted in its entirety in Appendix B. OIG previously issued a Management Assistance Report related to this topic that offered three recommendations to improve the process by which the Department reports the Afghan SIV applicant wait times.

June 2020

OFFICE OF AUDITS

MIDDLE EAST REGION OPERATIONS

## Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program

### What OIG Found

OIG evaluated the eight obstacles identified by Congress. Two obstacles did not significantly affect the Department's implementation of the Afghan SIV program. One obstacle, the uncertainty of visa availability, affects implementation but depends on congressional SIV allocation. However, five obstacles, if unaddressed, will remain impediments to implementing the Afghan SIV program and achieving the goals defined by statute, which is to issue an SIV within a 9-month timeframe. Specifically, OIG found that the Department's staffing levels across its various offices that process Afghan SIVs have generally remained constant since 2016 and are insufficient to reduce the SIV applicant backlog. Similarly, staffing levels during the interagency and security check process contribute to delays in processing the Afghan SIVs. Additionally, the Department lacks a centralized database to effectively document the identity of locally employed staff and contractors. Instead, the Department relies on multiple information technology systems that are not interoperable. Finally, OIG found that the U.S. Government offers protection and safety to SIV applicants within the confines of the workplace; however, protection outside of work hours is impracticable.

These obstacles exist, in part, because the Senior Coordinating Official position, which is intended to oversee and direct the Afghan SIV program, has been vacant since January 2017. As a result, the Department's management of resources and strategic planning for the Afghan SIV program is decentralized and lacks the focus needed to continuously evaluate the program and seek improvements. In addition, the Senior Coordinating Official position is needed to plan for changes in applicant volume throughout the SIV process and to promote continuity of operations. Until a designated leader has the authority to direct the management of the Afghan SIV program, these obstacles will continue to hinder the U.S. Government's ability to timely process Afghan SIV applicants who are experiencing threats as a result of their employment with the U.S. Government.