

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)  
About Resettlement Benefits for Iraqi and Afghan  
Recipients of Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs)**

**Q: I am an Afghan/Iraqi SIV recipient. Am I eligible for any resettlement benefits?**

**A:** Afghan and Iraqi SIV recipients are eligible for the same transportation and resettlement assistance, entitlement programs, and other benefits as refugees admitted under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). The U.S. Department of State funds resettlement agencies to provide reception and initial integration services during SIV recipients' first weeks in the United States through the Reception and Placement (R&P) Program. This program constitutes a small part of the overall refugee benefits package. Beyond the R&P Program administered by the U.S. Department of State, SIV recipients are eligible to receive up to eight months of cash and medical assistance through the Department of Health and Human Service's Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). ORR-funded benefits are independent of Department of State benefits. More information about ORR-funded benefits can be found on the ORR website [here](#).

**Q: What is the difference between U.S. Department of State benefits and ORR benefits? Are they part of the same package?**

**A:** The R&P Program administered by the U.S. Department of State and the Cash and Medical Assistance (CMA) Program administered by ORR are two separate and distinct programs, administered by two different U.S. Government agencies. SIV recipients may enroll in the U.S. Department of State's R&P Program prior to or after their arrival to the United States. Enrollment in the R&P Program does not result in automatic enrollment in the ORR CMA Program. The CMA Program is administered by individual States, and individuals can apply upon arrival to the United States, whether or not they are enrolled in the U.S. Department of State R&P Program.

SIV recipients who elect to participate in the U.S. Department of State's R&P Program are sponsored by one of nine resettlement agencies participating in the R&P Program under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of State. The sponsoring agency is responsible for placing SIV recipients with one of its affiliated offices and for providing initial services which include: housing, essential furnishings, food, necessary clothing, cultural orientation, and assistance with access to other social, medical, and employment services during the visa recipient's first 30 - 90 days in the United States. There are over 200 affiliated R&P offices across the United States.

ORR-funded benefits are administered by States, and are available through State benefit-granting agencies. After arrival in the United States, SIV recipients may apply for these benefits in the State in which they reside. SIV recipients who elect to participate in the U.S. Department of State R&P Program will be assisted in applying for ORR-funded benefits by the resettlement agency providing their R&P services. SIV recipients who do not elect

to participate in the Department of State's R&P Program must apply for these benefits on their own by contacting the State Refugee Coordinator [here](#) in the state in which you live.

**Q: Do I receive R&P benefits automatically, or do I have to apply for them?**

**A:** Resettlement benefits are *not* automatic. SIV applicants should declare their intention to participate in the U.S. Department of State R&P Program by filling out and returning electronic copies of the Resettlement Benefits Election Form and the DS-0234 Biodata Form to the National Visa Center (NVC), the Refugee Processing Center (RPC), or appropriate Resettlement Support Center (RSC) as soon as possible while still overseas or upon arrival in the United States.

**Q: What if I have to travel immediately and cannot arrange travel through the International Organization for Migration (IOM)?**

Under certain circumstances you may not have time to declare your intention to participate in the R&P Program while still overseas. If you elect to arrange your own flight, you may still be eligible for Department of State resettlement benefits or benefits funded by the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). **To determine if you qualify, please contact a resettlement affiliate as soon as possible after your arrival in the United States as your eligibility is time-limited.** We recommend you contact a resettlement affiliate within 30 days after your arrival. The list of resettlement affiliates can be found on <http://www.wrapsnet.org/> or click [here](#). **Please note: Due to extremely high housing costs and limited housing availability, only those SIVs joining a spouse, parent, sibling, child, or grandparent will be allowed to receive R&P benefits in the Northern Virginia area.**

**Q: How do I obtain a travel loan?**

**A:** Only SIV recipients who elect to participate in the R&P Program while still overseas are eligible to receive a travel loan to cover the costs of his/her transportation to the United States. In order to receive the travel loan, SIV recipients must travel on a flight arranged by IOM. IOM will prepare each individual's travel loan and arrange his/her travel to the United States.

**Q: What are the repayment conditions of the travel loan and what is the interest rate incurred?**

**A:** The travel loan is interest-free. Repayment of the loan generally begins within six months after arrival and must be paid in full in 42 months. The recipient should repay the loan in the monthly payments set forth in the loan note. The monthly payments should be sent to the resettlement agency designated on the loan note. Repaying the travel loan helps to establish an individual's good credit rating in the United States, and avoids having the loan returned to IOM or the Department of State for further collection action.

**Q: If I elect to participate in the R&P Program, who will process my application for resettlement benefits?**

**A:** As of July 2010, the entity responsible for processing your Department of State benefits will depend on the location of your visa issuance post. If you are an Iraqi applicant and your visa is being processed by the U.S. Embassy in Turkey, Lebanon, UAE, Yemen, or Kuwait, your application for benefits will be processed by the Department-funded Resettlement Support Center (RSC) based in Istanbul, Turkey. If you are an Iraqi applicant and your visa is being processed by any other U.S. Embassy, your application for resettlement benefits will be processed by the RSC based in Amman, Jordan. All Afghan applicants will be processed for benefits by the RPC, regardless of embassy location.

**Q: At what point should I begin to sell property and/or give up my job?**

**A:** An applicant should NOT sell property and/or give up employment until the U.S. Embassy or Consulate General has issued a visa and your case has been referred to IOM for travel arrangements.

**Q: What does the basic living assistance provide? Does this include housing and meals?**

**A:** Resettlement agencies participating in the Department of State's R&P Program are required to provide basic needs support for the first month after arrival. This includes housing and food or a food allowance until other forms of assistance (public cash assistance and food stamps) can be accessed by the SIV recipient.

**Q: Is the basic living assistance provided for the first 30 days also a loan?**

**A:** No. The R&P Program of the U.S. Department of State provides funding to the resettlement agency assigned to assist the SIV beneficiary. The funds are to be used to provide necessary items, including payment of rent.

**Q: What type of housing assistance is offered if I choose to participate in the R&P Program? Will I be required to live with other immigrants in the same building?**

**A:** Housing varies from one location to another. In general, the housing provided is a modest apartment furnished with items that have been donated by other members of the local community. It is quite common for the apartment buildings in which SIV recipients are placed to house a wide variety of people representing diverse races and ethnicities, cultures, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds.

**Q: If I choose not to participate in the U.S. Department of State's R&P Program, can I apply for a social security card at any office without assistance?**

**A:** Yes. An SIV recipient may apply for a social security card at a Social Security Administration Field Office without assistance. Please click [here](#) to find the Social Security Administration Field Office that is closest to you.

SIV applicants who request a social security card on their DS-260 Form (Immigrant Visa Electronic Application) will receive their social security cards in the mail. The card will be mailed to the address provided by the applicant on the DS-260 Form shortly after arrival in the United States.

**Q: If I choose *not* to participate in the Department of State’s R&P Program, will I be allowed to visit any local doctor for treatment and have it be funded by ORR?**

**A:** No. An individual must apply for ORR-funded medical benefits called Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) and be found eligible in order to have ORR pay for any medical treatment.

**Q: How long does it take to receive assistance from ORR upon arrival in the United States?**

**A:** Application processing times vary from state to state. An individual can access ORR benefits by applying for benefits in the state in which he/she is residing. ORR will provide a contact in the individual’s state of residence who can assist him/her with information about where to apply for ORR benefits.

**Q: Can I apply for ORR benefits and services as soon as I arrive in the United States?**

**A:** Yes. Eligibility is time-limited by law. Therefore, individuals should apply for ORR-funded benefits and services as soon as they arrive in the United States.

**Q: I would like to be resettled in a particular city or state. What should I do?**

**A:** SIV recipients overseas who declare their intention to participate in the R&P Program will be offered a list of cities from which they may select a resettlement preference. These are cities with Afghan and/or Iraqi communities and the capacity to serve SIVs. If you would like to be resettled to one of the listed cities, please indicate your preference by writing the selected city on page 2 of the DS-0234 SIV Biodata Form under Section E, entitled “Comments”.

You may also designate a resettlement preference for other cities in the United States if you have family or friends (a U.S. tie) living in those locations. Applicants may include this information on the DS-0234 SIV Biodata Form under Section D, entitled “U.S. Ties.” If an applicant has a U.S. tie, he/she should provide the full name, address, telephone number, and email address of the individual(s) he/she desires to be resettled near, including the nature of his/her relationship to this individual(s) (i.e. mother, daughter, brother, etc.). If more than one individual is provided and they live in different locations, applicants

should indicate their order of preference. Please note that the U.S. tie must be currently living in the United States (not living or working overseas), and must be willing to discuss the applicant's case with a resettlement agency.

**Please be aware that the cost of living and the availability of housing can vary significantly in different locations across the United States. Due to extremely high housing costs and limited housing availability, among other challenges, only SIVs joining a spouse, parent, sibling, child, or grandparent will be placed in the Northern Virginia area. Unless you have immediate relatives in this area, it is best to choose a location from the list of SIV placement options, or allow a resettlement agency to choose a more suitable location for you.**

**Q: How will I know which agency is responsible for providing services?**

**A:** If an SIV applicant overseas chooses to participate in the R&P Program, the applicant's case will be assigned to a resettlement agency before departure to the United States. Prior to departure, the entity responsible for processing the applicant's case for R&P benefits - either an RSC or the RPC - will provide the applicant with information about the affiliate office that will provide services upon arrival.

**Q: Is there anyone I can contact to find out more about SIV resettlement benefits and post-arrival services?**

**A:** Additional questions regarding the SIV benefits program should be directed to the RPC at [siv@wrapsnet.org](mailto:siv@wrapsnet.org).

**Q: Where can I find more information about life in the United States and what to expect when I get there?**

**A:** The Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange has cultural information that may be useful for your transition to life in the United States. Find the *Welcome Guide* and the Welcome Video here: <https://coresourceexchange.org/resource/english-welcome-guide-textbook/>

Applicants are encouraged to watch the following orientation videos which have been produced for SIV applicants resettling to the United States:  
<https://coresourceexchange.org/resource/siv-video-series/>

For more information about living in the U.S. go to: [www.corenav.org](http://www.corenav.org)

**Q: Who are the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Agencies providing R&P services?**

**A:** There are nine Resettlement Agencies that participate in the R&P Program under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of State. These agencies have over 200

affiliated R&P offices across the United States. For more information on the resettlement agencies, please see their websites, listed below:

Church World Service (CWS)  
[www.churchworldservice.org](http://www.churchworldservice.org)

Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM)  
[www.episcopalchurch.org/emm/](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/emm/)

Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC)  
[www.ecdcus.org](http://www.ecdcus.org)

HIAS  
[www.hias.org](http://www.hias.org)

International Rescue Committee (IRC)  
[www.rescue.org](http://www.rescue.org)

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS)  
[www.lirs.org](http://www.lirs.org)

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)  
[www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org)

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)  
[www.usccb.org/mrs](http://www.usccb.org/mrs)

World Relief (WR)  
[www.wr.org](http://www.wr.org)

**Q: What does the R&P program offer that an American friend/colleague cannot?**

**A:** Local resettlement agencies offer a great deal of experience and knowledge in assisting newcomers to adjust to their local communities. In many cases they are multi-service agencies that can assist clients in easily accessing local programs and resources. They are experienced in partnering with friends and relatives to support resettlement and aid clients as needed and as appropriate. They can also provide additional support to newcomers should unforeseen circumstances make the burdens of resettlement too difficult to overcome on their own.

**Q: How do I apply for a SIV?**

**A:** Eligibility and application information for the SIV program is available on the U.S. Department of State's website [here](#).

- Specific information on the SIV Program for Iraqi and Afghan Translators and Interpreters can be found [here](#).
- Specific information on the SIV Program for Iraqis Employed by or on Behalf of the U.S. Government can be found [here](#).
- Specific information on the SIV Program for Afghans Employed by or on Behalf of the U.S. Government can be found [here](#).
- For additional questions about filing I-360 petitions with the Nebraska Service Center, individuals may send an email to [SIVTranslator.NSC@dhs.gov](mailto:SIVTranslator.NSC@dhs.gov).

**Q: I submitted a Special Immigrant Visa petition. How do I find out the status of my application?**

**A:** Individuals who have questions regarding filing requirements and instructions for an SIV petition should contact the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), at [SIVTranslator.NSC@dhs.gov](mailto:SIVTranslator.NSC@dhs.gov). When an approved petition reaches the National Visa Center, the applicant will be advised by e-mail and provided with instructions. Individuals who have questions about their SIV petition once it's been approved should contact the National Visa Center directly at [NVCInquiry@state.gov](mailto:NVCInquiry@state.gov) or 1-603-334-0700. Customer Service Representatives at the National Visa Center are available from 7:30 a.m. to midnight (EST).

**Q: I have already been referred to the USRAP or have been interviewed as a refugee, but I am also eligible for a Special Immigrant Visa. Which application should I pursue?**

**A:** It is up to each individual to decide which of the two programs to pursue. Both processes take several months to complete, if not longer. Registration and application for either program is not a guarantee of eventual admission to the United States. Applicants may pursue both applications simultaneously. The refugee and SIV programs differ in terms of process and eligibility.

**Q: What if someone already has a file with UNHCR or a UN number? What should they do?**

**A:** Applicants who meet the eligibility criteria of the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Program can apply, even if they are registered with UNHCR and/or have an application pending with the USRAP.

**Q: If admitted to the United States, do I get U.S. citizenship? If so, how long does it take?**

**A:** SIV recipients gain Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) status upon entry to the United States. Once admitted, SIV recipients are eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship after residing in the United States for five (5) years.