

From: SMART Archive
Sent: Tue, 16 Nov 2021 22:38:29 GMT
To: SMART Core
Subject: Recalibration of Consular Services Prioritization at Posts Abroad

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SBU



MRN: [21 STATE 115378](#)
Date/DTG: Nov 16, 2021 / 162235Z NOV 21
From: SECSTATE WASHDC
Action: ALL DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR POSTS COLLECTIVE *ROUTINE*
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: CMGT, CVIS, CASC, CPAS
Captions: SENSITIVE
Reference: A) [20 State 110220](#)
B) [21 State 14702](#)
C) [21 State 88936](#)
D) [21 State 94990](#)
E) [21 State 62434](#)
F) [21 State 53968](#)
G) [21 State 39786](#)

Pass Line: Pass to Department of Homeland Security
Subject: Recalibration of Consular Services Prioritization at Posts Abroad

1. (SBU) SUMMARY:

- This cable rescinds mandatory prioritization guidance in Ref A, B, and C. Consular chiefs should determine the priority order of consular services processed at post with the caveats listed in para 6 including ensuring post prioritizes special consular services in the American Citizens Services unit.
- Post should work to reintroduce routine nonimmigrant visa (NIV) appointment types into its workload, update publicly available wait times on travel.state.gov, and share resource requirements with CA/EX.
- To the extent possible and while maintaining a focus on the security of the visa process, post must take advantage of process

innovations offered in para 3 and ensure there is a robust system for identifying emergency and priority travel for NIV applicants.
END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) The Department commends consular sections' resilience, dedication, and creativity during the last year and a half as the global pandemic disrupted the work of diplomacy across the world, taking a particular toll on consular sections. We recognize many posts still have COVID-related occupancy restrictions on space and significant staffing challenges. However, as global travel recovers and resources begin to increase, post should begin to rebalance workload across consular services to meet the demand of the rebounding travel sector. For posts that have not done so yet, this includes reintroducing routine NIVs for work and tourism into the workload. This is the first in a series of cables dedicated to providing post with information and instructions to help address these challenges.

3. **(SBU) A Balancing Act:** CA remains focused on providing all possible flexibilities and resources to post to support and streamline processing and to preserve waiting room space for those applicants who must appear in person. Expanded NIV interview waiver (IW) authorities are detailed in 9 FAM 403.5-4(A)(1)(a) and Ref C. The DS-82 Repatriation Program (Ref E) now processes passports in four to six weeks. The GSS Program Team is standing by at GSS_Program_Team@state.gov to discuss increased greeter needs to match expanded interview scheduling. Additionally, LE staff and EFM hiring freezes are lifted for CA positions. However, while adjudicator hiring will be doubled in 2022, it will be many months before most posts return to pre-pandemic staffing. CA/VO and CA/EX are similarly working to expand the Remote Processing Unit (RPU) and remote adjudication options with a view to providing more posts assistance with IW adjudication, but it will be some months before this is in place. We urge post to examine the efficiencies offered and to implement as many of them as possible. Further, post should maximize adjudicator time on tasks that only adjudicators can do and that must be performed

at post.

4. (SBU) Wait Times: We are aware when routine visa processing is introduced at posts that have not been able to schedule appointments, many posts will face extended visa interview wait times driven by pent-up demand. We do not expect you will immediately work through these backlogs. However, we do expect consular managers will use all tools and resources available to maximize processing efficiencies, including those outlined in para 3. Post should also have a robust system to identify and expedite priority travel across all visa categories. Please review and refresh your Referral Program and ensure it is well understood throughout your mission (9 FAM 601.8) and make sure all mission members are aware of how to identify and refer to the consular section applicants whose travel is in the U.S. national interest.

5. (SBU) Security: Maximizing efficiency while faithfully enforcing visa ineligibility grounds and protecting national security is a shared responsibility. CA will continue to work with interagency partners to extend and expand use of interview waiver authorities and offer broad processing efficiencies that are of significant help to post. Posts that have not used the IW authorities should assess the utility in doing so and contact your VO/F analysts with any questions or concerns.

6. (SBU) Scheduling Framework: Please bear the following in mind as you prioritize your work. CA understands there will be many competing demands on consular sections' time and space. Managing them all will require agility and flexibility.

- Special Consular Services must remain a priority.
- Consistent with Congressional direction, post should strive to process immediate relative cases and nonimmigrant K visa applications of fiancés of U.S. citizens within 30 days, and family preference cases within 60 days of the receipt of all necessary documents. This includes adoption cases.
- It is the Department's policy to use as many of the 55,000 diversity visas available each fiscal year as possible.

- Posts should also prioritize cases raised by the Visa Office (e.g., cases related to litigation).
- Seasonal priorities such as H-2 applicants, students, U.S. government-funded exchange visitors, and Summer Work and Travel applicants must also be a factor.

7. (SBU) Communication: Front Offices, Public Affairs Offices, and Consular Sections should actively manage the expectations of visa applicants, embassy colleagues, host government officials, and other stakeholders, as CA will do in Washington, including by providing actual NIV wait times on travel.state.gov through updating this information in the CCD. (When you reintroduce a visa category, please no longer use the “999” code for information not available.) Updated press guidance and other resources will be available on [Content Commons](#). We recognize your particular decisions will be based on local circumstances and will require tailored messaging for your audiences. We stand ready to help you craft those specific messages.

8. (SBU) Health and Safety First: Consular managers must be mindful of the health and safety of their staff and those in U.S. government facilities. This means post’s FO, MGMT, MED, RSO, Facilities Maintenance Offices, and other sections must jointly determine how best to maximize numbers of people appearing for consular services, while also conforming to public health practices and local laws, such as masking and social distancing. Consular managers also should pay close attention to the psychological well-being of their colleagues; confronting escalating demand for consular services in the wake of a pandemic can exact a toll on even the most effective and collegial consular teams.

9. (SBU) Innovation: CA is working hard on providing resources and innovation to ease post’s transition back to more regular order. See Ref. F for more information on AutoHotKey and Ref. G for IV processing tips. We urge consular managers to consistently make a safe space for innovative ideas presented by the professionals closest to the process.

CA is committed to collecting these ideas, developing them, and sharing them. Please send them on to 1CA@state.gov.

10. (SBU) Resource Help: We also encourage you to advocate for resources and support at your mission as we face this challenge together. You will certainly have the Bureau’s support as you do so.

11. (SBU) Visas and travel to the United States for work and tourism are crucial to continued U.S. economic recovery and to President Biden’s promise of a foreign policy for the middle class. Visas, especially NIVs, are also a critical element in many bilateral relationships and the key to the people to people ties that are the strength of our diplomacy. Our recovery and return to pre-pandemic operations will not be easy but it is an exciting moment. It is also necessary. CA is 100 percent focused on supporting you and addressing these challenges together.

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