

**DHS Did Not Adequately or
Efficiently Deploy
Its Employees to U.S.
Military Installations in
Support of
Operation Allies Welcome**





OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528 / www.oig.dhs.gov

July 27, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Alejandro N. Mayorkas
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security

FROM: Joseph V. Cuffari, Ph.D. **JOSEPH V
CUFFARI**

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SUBJECT: *DHS Did Not Adequately or Efficiently Deploy
Its Employees to U.S. Military Installations in Support of
Operation Allies Welcome*

Attached for your information is our final report, *DHS Did Not Adequately or Efficiently Deploy Its Employees to U.S. Military Installations in Support of Operation Allies Welcome*. We incorporated the formal comments from DHS in the final report.

The report contains three recommendations DHS can implement to avoid potential staffing shortages in future operations and to improve DHS' ability to deploy and support its employees during emergency operations. Based on information provided in your response to the draft report, we consider one recommendation resolved and closed and two recommendations resolved and open. Once your office has fully implemented the open recommendations, please submit a formal close out letter to us within 30 days so we may close them. The letter should be accompanied by evidence of completion of agreed upon corrective actions. Please send your response or closure requests to OIGISPFollowup@oig.dhs.gov.

Consistent with our responsibility under the *Inspector General Act*, we will provide copies of our report to congressional committees with oversight and appropriation responsibility over the Department of Homeland Security. We will post the report on our website for public dissemination.

Please call me with any questions, or your staff may contact Thomas Kait, Deputy Inspector General for the Office of Inspections and Evaluations, at (202) 981-6000.

Attachment



DHS OIG HIGHLIGHTS

DHS Did Not Adequately or Efficiently Deploy Its Employees to U.S. Military Installations in Support of Operation Allies Welcome

July 27, 2022

Why We Did This Evaluation

As the lead Federal agency for Operation Allies Welcome, DHS deployed its employees to U.S. military safe havens to assist with resettlement of Afghan evacuees. We conducted this evaluation to determine DHS' effectiveness recruiting, deploying, and managing the DHS employees detailed to or volunteering at the safe havens. We conducted fieldwork from November 2021 to January 2022, including visiting six of eight safe havens where DHS employees served.

What We Recommend

We recommend one action DHS can take to avoid potential staffing shortages in future operations and two actions to improve DHS' ability to deploy and support its employees during emergency operations.

For Further Information:

Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202) 981-6000, or email us at DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov

What We Found

As the lead Federal agency for Operation Allies Welcome (OAW), the Department of Homeland Security coordinated efforts across the Federal Government to resettle individuals evacuated from Afghanistan. Part of DHS' responsibility was staffing safe havens at U.S. military installations with enough detailed DHS employees to carry out specific leadership and support roles. DHS advertised these detail opportunities to its employees but did not direct components to commit all necessary staff and did not initially receive funding. Therefore, DHS did not fill all the positions. DHS also recruited employee volunteers through the DHS Volunteer Force (VF). However, DHS could not reimburse components for the costs of travel and overtime, making some components reluctant to fund the volunteer deployments and further limiting the number of DHS employees at safe havens. The shortage of DHS employees affected the safe havens' ability to provide certain services to Afghan guests. Also, some DHS employee volunteers told us they did not feel adequately supported before and during deployments. Some described difficulty reaching the DHS VF, and others were uncertain about how to make travel plans or complete administrative paperwork. Overall, we determined DHS did not have a structure to support volunteers for unfunded operations such as OAW.

DHS Response

DHS concurred with all three recommendations. We consider two recommendations resolved and open and one recommendation resolved and closed. See Appendix B for DHS' full response.



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Abbreviations

CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
FC	Federal Coordinator
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FLETC	Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OAR	Operation Allies Refuge
OAW	Operation Allies Welcome
S2	DHS Deputy Secretary
TSA	Transportation Security Administration
UCG	Unified Coordination Group
USCIS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
VF	Volunteer Force



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Background

As part of its withdrawal from Afghanistan, the United States conducted evacuation operations for tens of thousands of people, including particularly vulnerable Afghans such as journalists, human rights workers, and women's rights activists and those who worked alongside the U.S. military and diplomats. On July 14, 2021, the White House announced¹ Operation Allies Refuge (OAR),² led by the Department of State (DOS), to support the relocation of interested and eligible Afghan nationals and their immediate families. Through OAR, evacuees from Afghanistan were temporarily relocated to "lily pads,"³ where they underwent screening and vetting prior to being flown to the United States. The Department of Homeland Security deployed approximately 300 personnel from its components⁴ to lily pads to conduct processing, screening, and vetting in coordination with the Department of Defense (DOD), DOS, and other Federal agencies.

After screening and vetting, Afghan evacuees traveled to a U.S. port of entry,⁵ then to a temporary processing center.⁶ DOS worked with DOD and DHS to coordinate an estimated 600 civilian and nongovernmental organization (NGO) staff to transition Afghan evacuees into the resettlement process. Most Afghan evacuees then traveled to one of eight U.S. military installation "safe havens"⁷ to reside as guests while awaiting resettlement in the United States. At the safe havens, Afghan guests received medical screenings and other medical services and could apply for immigration status and work authorizations through U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

¹ *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki*, Jul. 14, 2021.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/07/14/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-july-14-2021/>.

² OAR was a U.S. military operation to airlift certain at-risk Afghan civilians, U.S. embassy employees, and other prospective Special Immigrant Visa applicants from Afghanistan.

³ Lily pads — located in Bahrain, Germany, Kuwait, Italy, Qatar, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates — were used to temporarily shelter people evacuated from Afghanistan.

⁴ Specifically, employees from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Transportation Security Administration (TSA), United States Coast Guard (Coast Guard), and United States Secret Service (Secret Service) deployed to lily pads.

⁵ Most Afghan evacuees arrived at Dulles International Airport in Virginia or Philadelphia International Airport in Pennsylvania.

⁶ DOS managed a 24 hour, 7 days a week processing site at the Dulles Expo Center, near the Dulles International Airport, with an estimated staff of 200 to 250 from DOS and the U.S. Agency for International Development. These individuals welcomed the Afghan arrivals and processed them for onward travel to one of eight U.S. military installations. In addition, DOD managed a 24 hour, 7 days a week processing site in Camden, New Jersey.

⁷ DOD provided Afghan guests with temporary housing at eight U.S. military installations referred to as "safe havens": Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia; Fort Pickett, Virginia; Fort Lee, Virginia; Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico; Fort McCoy, Wisconsin; Fort Bliss, Texas; Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey; and Camp Atterbury, Indiana.



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On August 29, 2021, the President directed DHS to lead Operation Allies Welcome (OAW),⁸ an interagency collaboration to support and resettle vulnerable Afghans.⁹ OAW then began facilitating the continued processing, medical screenings and vaccinations, and other necessary services for Afghan evacuee resettlement in the United States by managing interagency coordination efforts, including those needed to operate and staff the safe havens.

Following the President's directive, the DHS Secretary appointed a Senior Response Official and established a Unified Coordination Group (UCG).¹⁰ The UCG consisted of representatives from DHS, DOS, DOD, and the Department of Health and Human Services, to coordinate implementation of a broad range of services for Afghan guests. The UCG conducted its work in close collaboration with DHS partners in state and local governments, NGOs, and the private sector to ensure Federal resources, authorities, and expertise were unified and synchronized.

To achieve its mission, the UCG recruited DHS employees to go on detail to safe havens in leadership and other roles. On September 1, 2021, the UCG Senior Response Official appointed a Federal Coordinator (FC)¹¹ to each of the eight safe havens to oversee the interagency operation. DHS also detailed employees to the safe havens to oversee and perform support functions, such as law enforcement and external affairs duties. To further staff the safe havens, on October 1, 2021,¹² the DHS Deputy Secretary (known within DHS

⁸ *Memorandum on the Designation of the Department of Homeland Security as Lead Federal Department for Facilitating the Entry of Vulnerable Afghans into the United States*. White House.gov, Aug. 29, 2021.

⁹ As of Jan. 28, 2022, DHS had supported the resettlement of more than 54,000 Afghans from safe havens. On Feb. 19, 2022, DHS announced all remaining Afghans who were housed at its last operational safe haven, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, had departed. DHS also clarified that it was working to transfer domestic safe haven operations from DOD installations to a single non-DOD domestic facility as it continued to welcome vulnerable Afghans to the United States.

¹⁰ According to the *DHS National Response Framework, Fourth Ed.*, Oct. 28, 2019, a UCG is made up of senior leaders representing state, tribal, territorial, insular area, and Federal interests, and in some instances included local jurisdictions, the private sector, and NGOs. A UCG is responsible for determining staffing levels and coordinating staff based on incident requirements. Further, a UCG should include operations, planning, public information, and logistics to integrate personnel for unity of government effort.

¹¹ OAW FCs were typically Senior Executive Service employees designated to coordinate Federal response efforts to ensure that Federal resources and authorities were used in a unified, synchronized manner to support the goals of OAW.

¹² At this time, some DHS employees were already supporting safe havens in volunteer and detail positions. In August 2021, prior to the S2 component-specific quotas, DHS emailed all employees requesting personnel to support the relocation of Afghan nationals.



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as S2) requested seven components¹³ provide 178¹⁴ volunteers to perform various general support duties, such as guest property management, meal preparation, interpretation, and supply runs.

Throughout OAW, DHS employees deployed to support safe havens in one of three ways:

- Directed detail deployments — DHS employees directed by the UCG or DHS leadership to fill a role at a safe haven;¹⁵
- Voluntary detail deployments — DHS employees recruited by safe haven leadership from their home or other components and deployed to safe havens to serve in various roles in support of OAW; or
- DHS Volunteer Force (VF)¹⁶ deployments — DHS employees registered as volunteers through the DHS VF program and typically deployed to safe havens as “generalists.”¹⁷

Overall, DHS employees detailed to or volunteering at the safe havens came from DHS Headquarters (HQ) and all components.

We evaluated DHS’ effectiveness recruiting, deploying, and managing its employees detailed to or volunteering at safe havens in support of OAW. To achieve our objectives, we visited six of eight safe havens, where we interviewed DHS employee detailees and volunteers supporting OAW. We also spoke to DHS HQ officials and reviewed documents and data provided by the UCG and DHS VF and gathered during our site visits. To further understand the DHS VF processes and procedures, we sent written questions to the DHS VF component coordinators and analyzed the responses. This report presents findings and recommendations to help DHS ensure preparedness to rapidly deploy its employees and avoid staffing shortages in future operations.

¹³ The following components received a request for a specific number of volunteers to support OAW: Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (22 volunteers requested), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (17), Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC) (7), DHS HQ (initially 65, reduced to 63 on Nov. 3, 2021), TSA (28), the Coast Guard (29), and the Secret Service (10). CBP, USCIS, and ICE were exempt from providing volunteers because they were already providing ongoing support for Afghan resettlement or the Southwest border migration surge.

¹⁴ The DHS VF reduced DHS HQ’s volunteer quota from 65 to 63 on Nov. 3, 2021, decreasing the total quota from 178 to 176.

¹⁵ This type of deployment also included Coast Guard members who were activated and deployed to support OAW at the safe havens.

¹⁶ The DHS VF was first activated as a temporary, Federal-wide volunteer force to assist with responding to the 2021 Southwest Border Migration Surge. The DHS VF has also been used to staff and support other non-Stafford Act incidents.

¹⁷ This deployment type also included FEMA reservists deployed and tracked by the DHS VF.



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Results of Evaluation

As the lead Federal agency for OAW, DHS coordinated efforts across the Federal Government to resettle individuals evacuated from Afghanistan. Part of DHS' responsibility was staffing safe havens at U.S. military installations with enough detailed DHS employees to carry out specific leadership and support roles. DHS advertised these detail opportunities to its employees but did not direct components to commit all necessary staff and did not initially receive funding for employee travel and overtime expenses. Therefore, DHS did not fill all the positions. DHS also recruited employee volunteers through the DHS VF. However, DHS could not reimburse components for the costs of travel and overtime, making some components reluctant to fund the volunteer deployments and further limiting the number of DHS employees at safe havens. The shortage of DHS employees affected the safe havens' ability to provide certain services to Afghan guests. Also, some DHS employee volunteers told us they did not feel adequately supported before and during deployments. Some described difficulty reaching the DHS VF via email, and others were uncertain about how to make travel plans or complete administrative paperwork. Overall, we determined DHS did not have a structure to support volunteers for unfunded operations such as OAW.

DHS Did Not Deploy Enough Staff to Adequately Support the OAW Mission at U.S. Military Installations

UCG objectives included providing for the safety and security of Afghan evacuees from their arrival in the United States through resettlement, including "ensur[ing] humanity, empathy, and compassion for all evacuees" while prioritizing resettlement.¹⁸ To successfully accomplish the resettlement mission, the UCG established detail positions necessary for each safe haven, and the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer established quotas for the number of DHS employee volunteers needed from 7 of 14 components.¹⁹ The UCG solicited employees to fill the detail positions by sending emails to component leadership announcing the vacancies. To request volunteers, the DHS Deputy Secretary sent letters to component heads announcing the quotas and encouraging them to support the OAW mission. However, throughout OAW the UCG did not fully staff the detail positions, and the DHS VF never met the quota. In fact, the DHS VF only met 38 percent of the volunteer quota (67 of 176) at the peak²⁰ of volunteer deployments.

¹⁸ *Unified Coordination Group Management Plan*, Dec. 07, 2021 – Dec. 14, 2021.

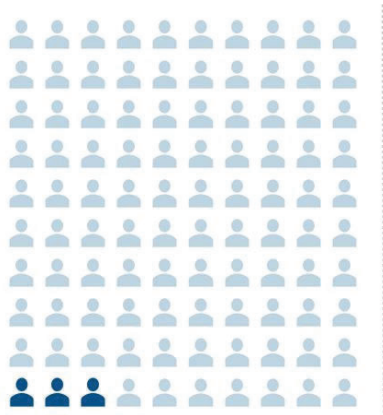
¹⁹ CBP, ICE, and USCIS were not assigned quotas, but they were not excluded from providing volunteers.

²⁰ Nov. 16, 2021.



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Between September 14, 2021, and January 25, 2022, DHS employees accounted for only 3 percent of the staff at safe havens.²¹ Partners such as DOD, which supplied nearly 87 percent of staff, assumed the majority of responsibility for providing staff at safe havens.



3%

The approximate percentage of safe haven staff made up of DHS employees

Although multiple agencies and NGOs supplied staff to the safe havens, some FCs and other safe haven leadership stated there were not enough DHS staff to accomplish the resettlement mission, particularly at the start of safe haven operations.

DHS Did Not Detail Enough Employees to Fill Specific Roles Identified by the UCG as Necessary for Safe Haven Operation

DHS was responsible for coordinating the OAW response and the resettlement effort among its Federal partners.²² The UCG identified detail positions necessary for each safe haven and shared those requirements with components. The identified positions included various specialized skillsets, such as budget unit leaders, public affairs officers, interpreters, and logistics and medical affairs officers. Initially, DHS and the UCG had no direct funding allocated to ensure they could meet basic safe haven resource needs, including filling the detailed positions with DHS employees. The UCG could not pay for employees' deployment-related expenses such as travel, lodging, rental vehicles, or overtime pay. Although the UCG filled some of the detail positions, three FCs at safe havens reported relying on their home components to fill roles the UCG could not. Further, a UCG official told us that filling the FC roles with Senior Executive Service employees from offices near safe havens allowed the FCs to use their local staff to fill detail positions.

Funding²³ and availability of personnel affected the UCG's ability to find and detail staff to the safe havens. Staff at four safe havens we visited told us the

²¹ We used weekly (Tuesday) Senior Leadership Brief data from Sept. 14, 2021 (first iteration of report we received with staffing breakdown by agency), to Jan. 25, 2022, for our calculation.

²² The UCG organizational chart from Oct. 2021 lists DHS, DOD, Department of Justice, DOS, and the Department of Health and Human Services as primary participants.

²³ A Dec. 3, 2021 continuing resolution granted the UCG \$147,456,000 for OAW, including the provision of staffing and support services for safe havens. The UCG applied the appropriated funds to pay for travel, benefits, salaries, and overtime related to deployments of DHS staff to safe havens, related contracts and purchases, and reimbursement to components for travel and overtime incurred. Before the appropriation, the UCG was unable to award new contracts



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UCG did not fill requests for staff in most cases, including multiple leaders who said they requested staff from the UCG and received none. Safe haven leaders and UGG staff shared their belief that components did not want to pay for employee details and speculated their reluctance was exacerbated by the nearness to the end of the fiscal year²⁴ and because they were operating under a continuing resolution.²⁵ Instead, FCs requested staff directly from their home components, usually from their own field offices. In some cases, the FCs used funds from their field office budgets to pay for deployment-related expenses. The majority of staff requested and deployed from FC home components were from ICE and CBP, and as a result, the missions of those components may have been adversely affected. One Deputy FC stated the OAW mission was a “big hit for operations” within that component because an estimated 60 percent of the senior staff was detailed for 2 months.

DHS led the coordination efforts and generally provided law enforcement staff at the safe havens. However, the majority of safe haven staff were employees from other Federal agencies and NGOs, whom DHS relied on to perform OAW mission duties. Responsibilities performed by OAW partners varied by safe haven, but at every location DOD provided housing, meals, medical care, cultural and religious services, and recreation, at a minimum, and supplied approximately 87 percent of staff across the safe havens. Safe haven leaders reported a positive working relationship with DOD at the safe havens, but one Deputy Federal Coordinator stated that DHS staff shortages affected the military’s mission because DOD had to commit additional staff to compensate. The same leader stated his safe haven team sent what he believed were “conservative and realistic” requests for employees to the UCG that went unfulfilled and that it was “embarrassing” for DHS [safe haven] leadership to hear from a DOD general that the base cannot afford to lose any more soldiers to the OAW mission without it impacting mission readiness. A DOD OIG report²⁶ confirmed these impacts by explaining how the extensive use of Marine Corps Base Quantico military personnel disrupted normal DOD operations.²⁷

or make purchases for OAW and thus was restricted to using existing resources from other Federal agencies, primarily DOD and DOS.

²⁴ The fiscal year ended on Sept. 30, 2021. According to a Sept. 8, 2021 memo from the UCG Senior Response Official, FCs were appointed to safe havens on Sept. 1, 2021. The first volunteer arrived at a safe haven on Sept. 13, 2021.

²⁵ According to *Office of Management and Budget Circular No. A-11, Section 123.1*, “Continuing resolutions (CRs) are joint resolutions that provide continuing appropriations for part of a fiscal year or for a full fiscal year ... [and] often enacted when the Congress has not yet passed new appropriations bills by October 1 or when the President has vetoed congressionally passed appropriations bills. Because of the nature of [CRs], [agencies] should operate at a minimal level until after [their] regular fiscal year appropriations are enacted.”

²⁶ DOD OIG, Report No. DODIG-2022-050, *Management Advisory: DoD Support for the Relocation of Afghan Nationals at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia*, Jan. 5, 2022.

²⁷ At the time of reporting, DOD OIG had issued reports about all eight safe havens (Fort Lee, Fort Pickett, Marine Corps Base Quantico, Fort Bliss, Fort McCoy, and Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, Camp Atterbury, and Holloman Air Force Base.)



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The shortage of detailed employees forced some safe haven leadership to consider limiting the types of services provided to guests. For example, at one safe haven a detailed USCIS employee who answered more than 400 guest questions per day was nearing the end of deployment and funding issues prevented USCIS from sending a replacement. Safe haven leadership was concerned about a decline in guest morale should they not have someone to answer questions about the resettlement process. The FC contemplated asking the Deputy FC, a USCIS employee, to fill that role instead of remaining in leadership. Additionally, resource managers at the safe havens reported that they repeatedly asked staff to fill positions such as social workers, pharmacists, and teachers, but the UCG did not send staff in most cases. Absent the adequate number of staff to fill the specific roles, DHS employees at safe havens strived to continue offering vital services such as counseling for women, general education, and USCIS staff availability. DHS staff providing these services reported working 10-12 hours per day, 7 days per week, with one DHS employee having worked 190 hours in a pay period in addition to remaining on call 24/7. Safe haven leadership and personnel expressed concern that they would eventually have to limit the vital services without additional staff resources from the UCG.

DHS VF Did Not Send Volunteers to Safe Havens Quickly and Never Met Quotas for Volunteers Needed at OAW Safe Havens

The DHS VF did not supply volunteers to the safe havens quickly or sufficiently. The Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer established, and the DHS Deputy Secretary disseminated, quotas for the number of DHS employee volunteers needed from components, but those quotas remained unmet during safe haven operations, as shown in Figure 1.²⁸ A UCG official stated that fulfilling the quotas was not mandatory and therefore did not help the UCG, as it could not “milk anything from the rocks.” Another UCG official indicated the volunteer process was inefficient and ineffective and described communication breakdowns between the DHS VF and the UCG, which negatively affected the number of volunteers sent to safe havens.

In contrast, when the DHS VF received a request to deploy volunteers overseas in support of OAR, it facilitated arrival of the first volunteer on site within 3 days,²⁹ despite never having deployed DHS volunteers overseas in prior

²⁸ We developed Figure 1 using data from Oct. 24, 2021, to Jan. 20, 2022, as the VF did not produce the S2 Daily Report (a daily report generated by the DHS VF to report the number of deployed volunteers, by component) or any other report tracking the OAW volunteer workforce outside those dates. Figure 1 data begins on Oct. 26, 2021, and ends on Jan. 18, 2022, as we selected data from 1 day a week (Tuesday) for the duration the S2 Daily Report was produced.

²⁹ In an Aug. 20, 2021 email, the DHS Deputy Under Secretary for Management requested DHS employees volunteer for the DHS VF to assist with the relocation of Afghan evacuees. By Aug. 23, 2021, the DHS VF had deployed eight volunteers overseas – five to Ramstein Air Base, Germany and three to Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar – in support of OAR.

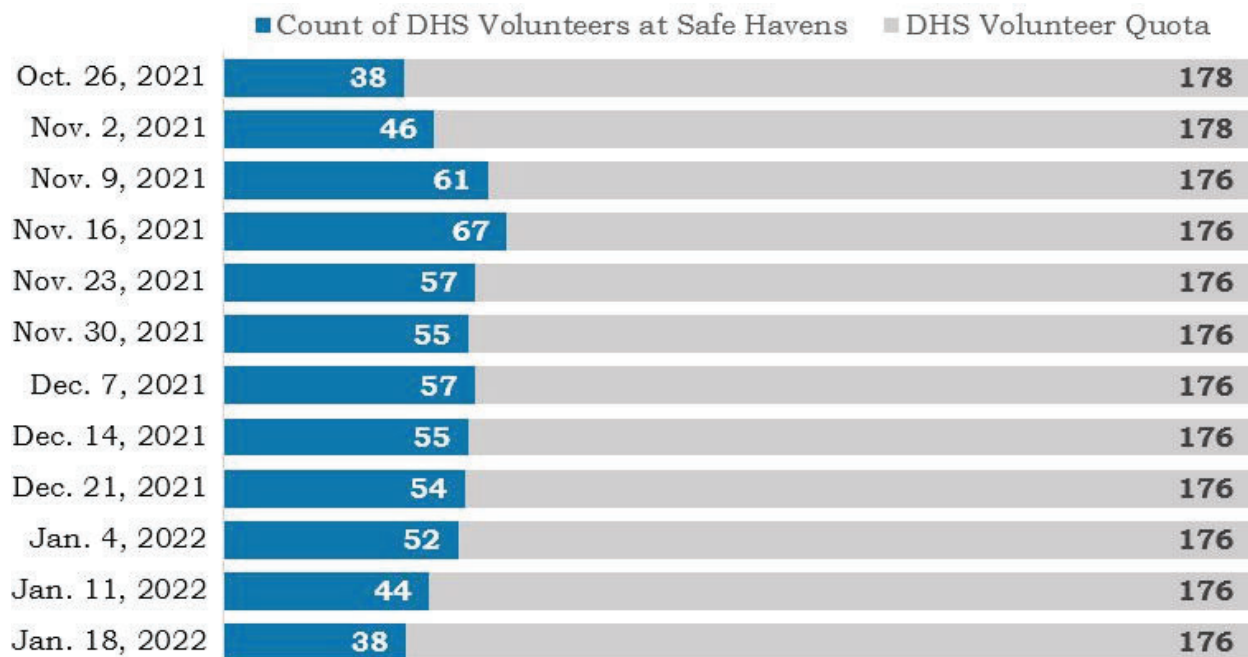


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situations. In 2019, the DHS VF supplied volunteers to assist CBP with a migrant surge at the Southwest border.³⁰ One Deputy FC recalled the “amazing” response from the DHS VF during that event and, upon hearing the DHS VF was coming to his safe haven, assumed it would be amazing again. He instead expressed disappointment and surprise that an insufficient number of volunteers arrived at the safe haven throughout his deployment.

Figure 1. Weekly Count of DHS Volunteers at Safe Havens, October 26, 2021, to January 18, 2022*



Source: DHS OIG analysis of DHS VF S2 Daily Reports

* The DHS VF did not produce reports prior to Oct. 24, 2021; on Tuesday, Dec. 28, 2021; or after Jan. 20, 2022, even though safe havens were open.

Although the DHS VF has experience quickly deploying volunteers, in this case it was challenging because no separate funding was available for OAW and the components had competing mission needs. The DHS VF resources were still being used to support operations at the Southwest border, and component exemptions also decreased the pool of eligible volunteers. On average DHS met only 30 percent of the S2 established quota for volunteers, with varying results from its components.

In addition to the funding issues and a limited volunteer pool, we identified other causes for delayed deployments and insufficient numbers of volunteers, such as how the DHS VF processed volunteer applications. DHS VF component coordinators suggested that slow processing by the VF affected how

³⁰ CBP paid the travel and overtime expenses for volunteers supporting OAR and the Southwest border migrant surge.



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many volunteers were deployed. For example, coordinators shared that applicants who were ready to deploy were not contacted until several months later and then were no longer available. A UCG official agreed, describing that by the time they were able to deploy someone, it was common for that person to be unavailable. A DHS VF official confirmed that delays can occur when potential volunteers are not put in contact with the right person or when volunteer status comments in the tracking system are not specific enough.³¹

DHS Did Not Fully Support Employee Volunteers Deployed to U.S. Military Installations for OAW

Throughout 2021, the DHS VF deployed more than 1,000 volunteers in support of missions such as the CBP Southwest border surge, OAR, and OAW. A typical DHS VF mission is funded by the component requesting volunteers. For instance, when volunteers deployed in support of CBP at the Southwest border, CBP paid their overtime and travel expenses. Also, the DHS VF typically arranges the deployments using invitational travel, providing direct support to each volunteer by creating travel authorizations and processing vouchers on their behalf in the mission host's travel system. For OAW deployments, the DHS VF was unable to use invitational travel or its centralized planning and travel teams because the UCG did not have funding to finance volunteer deployments. For the first time, DHS VF component coordinators had to rely on the components to locate funds to deploy their volunteers. As a result, OAW volunteers reported experiencing various challenges before and during the mobilization phase of their OAW deployments. Most complaints from volunteers cited inadequate communication between the DHS VF and volunteers and an absence of guidance or training to prepare them for deployments.

DHS Employee Volunteers Experienced Communication Challenges before and during OAW Deployments

On August 20, 2021, the DHS Deputy Under Secretary for Management sent a DHS-wide email encouraging employees to volunteer in support of OAW. In that month alone, 1,580 prospective volunteers registered with the DHS VF.³² More than 2 months later, on October 31, 2021, the DHS VF sent an email message thanking prospective volunteers for registering and shared that the

³¹ The DHS VF processes applicant data in SharePoint. We did not receive that data prior to ending our fieldwork. However, during one interview with a DHS VF official, we observed the SharePoint applicant tracking data and noticed that multiple users were manually updating status for at least 1,500 applicants. The DHS VF official described this manual update process as problematic.

³² Although 1,580 prospective volunteers registered in August, the DHS VF described that some of those applicants provided incomplete applications or were otherwise ineligible based on job series or component.



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needs of OAW were “as urgent as ever.” The email also requested that volunteers respond to DHS VF communications “in a timely manner” while acknowledging that many weeks or months had passed since some volunteers first registered as volunteers. Volunteers confirmed receiving no communication from the DHS VF about deployments for 1 to 2 months after they registered and described experiencing uncertainty about when they would deploy. Some volunteers proactively emailed the DHS VF after hearing nothing for weeks or months after submitting their applications.³³ However, their emails sometimes went unanswered.

A DHS VF official acknowledged that the ability to respond to the volume of inquiries in August was severely limited until September 2021, when DHS VF received additional help from DHS HQ personnel. Moreover, DHS components were already encountering fiscal year-end and continuing resolution budget constraints when the DHS VF informed components they would bear the full costs of their employees’ travel and overtime expenses. As a result, deployments were delayed, leaving volunteers uncertain whether they would be deployed.

Volunteers also expressed confusion about the deployment process, and some stated the instructions provided by the DHS VF were unclear. We reviewed deployment notices provided to volunteers in which the DHS VF gave instructions such as “create your travel order in Concur” and “use the correct accounting for the [OAW] DOS Drawdown Project Code DHS032” without additional instructions on how to accomplish these tasks or points of contact for those who could assist. Volunteers were routinely asked to deploy within 24 to 72 hours of receiving their selection notification, and for some it was their first deployment. Volunteers shared that the short timelines coupled with unclear instructions made it difficult to manage their deployments. Although some volunteers reported their component human resources staff was helpful, other volunteers had a different experience, noting they were left searching for accounting codes and trying to figure out how to navigate their components’ travel systems. DHS VF component coordinators echoed the concerns of volunteers and confirmed that volunteers were confused about how to make travel plans.

³³ There are two ways to apply to the DHS VF: (1) new volunteers are required to fill out an online registration form, which includes uploading a Prison Rape Elimination Act self-reporting form and a deployment authorization form signed by one’s supervisor; and (2) volunteers who previously deployed with the DHS VF are only required to send an email to the DHS VF central inbox expressing their interest to redeploy and their availability dates. Only DHS VF leadership and members of the planning team had access to the inbox during the August influx of volunteer applications. Additionally, the registration form does not solicit volunteer input regarding which mission a volunteer wishes to support.



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DHS Employee Volunteers Did Not Receive Training or Deployment Support from the DHS VF

All OAW volunteers we asked confirmed the DHS VF did not provide orientation or training in preparation for their deployments before or after arriving at safe havens. Upon arrival, most volunteers were only provided a tour of the base.³⁴ However, the DHS VF's "frequently asked questions" webpage states, "Many of the volunteer positions do not require any formal qualification, and training will be provided before performance of duties." Volunteers said they administratively reported to the onsite volunteer coordinators but functionally managed themselves.

Volunteers we asked also stated that neither the DHS VF nor the UCG provided training to new volunteers about deployment expectations, including practical information about submitting timesheets and expenses. The absence of funding for OAW deployments meant that component coordinators, rather than the DHS VF planning and travel teams, coordinated and managed OAW deployments. As a result, volunteers sometimes encountered difficulties when coordinating their travel and completing administrative paperwork. Although each safe haven had volunteer coordinators to help volunteers with administrative actions and issues, volunteers nonetheless reported uncertainty about how to claim overtime and how to complete a voucher to receive reimbursement for expenses.

DHS VF staff cited funding challenges, competing priorities, and a limited pool from which to recruit volunteers as reasons affecting the number and timeliness of volunteer deployments in support of OAW. Although these reasons explain why volunteer deployments were delayed, there also may have been a cadre of volunteers willing to deploy quickly who were not deployed. The safe havens needed volunteers, but slow communication from the DHS VF to potential volunteers meant that some were not deployed for weeks or months after applying to the DHS VF.

Challenges notwithstanding, the employees who supported the safe havens as DHS VF volunteers remained committed to the OAW mission. Although volunteers' sentiments about their deployment experiences varied by safe haven, volunteers shared success stories and positive takeaways with their volunteer peers and other DHS employees detailed in support of OAW.

³⁴ Volunteers deployed to the Fort Bliss safe haven told us that the military provided them onsite training for prevention of sexual assault.



Conclusion

As the lead Federal agency for OAW, DHS had a responsibility to not only coordinate Federal efforts to resettle individuals evacuated from Afghanistan, but also to provide staff support for the operation. Without funding, DHS faced challenges paying for the staff deployments. However, for this urgent situation, DHS could have considered directing component staff to support OAW. Moreover, the DHS VF could have facilitated volunteers more quickly and efficiently had it relied on established processes and infrastructure rather than placing the burden of arranging volunteer travel for this unfunded operation on the components. To avoid potential staffing shortages in future operations, DHS should develop a framework for directing DHS components to deploy staff to support missions, including non-centrally funded, unplanned, and emergency operations. Also, DHS can better posture itself for future preparedness by developing a volunteer deployment strategy that includes provisions for supporting and training volunteers, regardless of the deployment funding source.

Recommendations

We recommend the DHS Secretary:

Recommendation 1: Develop a framework for directing DHS components to deploy staff to support missions, including non-centrally funded, unplanned, or emergency operations, for which DHS resources are needed.

Recommendation 2: Develop a volunteer deployment strategy that includes provisions for supporting volunteers, regardless of funding source.

We recommend the DHS Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer:

Recommendation 3: Develop and implement training for DHS employee volunteers to prepare for deployment, including but not limited to training on how to complete administrative paperwork and make travel arrangements.

Management Comments and OIG Analysis

DHS concurred with the recommendations and described corrective actions. Appendix B contains DHS' management comments in their entirety. We also received technical comments on the draft report and revised the report as appropriate.

A summary of DHS' response and our analysis follows.



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Recommendation 1: Develop a framework for directing DHS components to deploy staff to support missions, including non-centrally funded, unplanned, or emergency operations, for which DHS resources are needed.

DHS Response to Recommendation: Concur. DHS leadership recognizes that there is always room to improve its programs, operations, and other activities. The DHS Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO), in conjunction with other DHS entities (as appropriate), will review existing processes and procedures to determine what adjustments may be necessary to deploy volunteers more efficiently and effectively in the future. Estimated Completion Date (ECD): May 31, 2023.

OIG Analysis: We consider these actions responsive to the recommendation, which is resolved and open. We will close this recommendation when we receive evidence showing that DHS has reviewed processes and procedures and developed a framework for deploying staff to support missions, including non-centrally funded, unplanned, or emergency operations.

Recommendation 2: Develop a volunteer deployment strategy that includes provisions for supporting volunteers, regardless of funding source.

DHS Response to Recommendation: Concur. The DHS CHCO, in consultation with the DHS Acting Chief Financial Officer and other relevant DHS entities, will develop and implement a volunteer deployment strategy that includes provisions for supporting volunteers regardless of funding source. ECD: May 31, 2023.

OIG Analysis: We consider these actions responsive to the recommendation, which is resolved and open. We will close this recommendation when we receive evidence showing that DHS has developed and implemented a volunteer deployment strategy that includes provisions for supporting volunteers regardless of funding source.

Recommendation 3: Develop and implement training for DHS employee volunteers to prepare for deployment, including but not limited to training on how to complete administrative paperwork and make travel arrangements.

DHS Response to Recommendation: Concur. As currently constituted, the DHS Volunteer Force Coordination Cell (VFCC) already provides training for all volunteers that is responsive to this recommendation, including pre-deployment briefs, informational emails, onsite orientation, and weekly ongoing training. DHS VFCC sector leads also provide onsite training at all volunteer sites on a wide variety of topics, including those related to proper timekeeping of hours worked, which will continue to be an integral part of the DHS VFCC operations. DHS provided OIG with documentation corroborating these efforts



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under a separate cover on June 2, 2022. DHS requests that OIG consider this recommendation resolved and closed, as implemented.

OIG Analysis of DHS Comments: In response to this recommendation, DHS provided documentation demonstrating it has procedures in place to provide training to volunteers prior to and during deployments. The documentation included examples of training provided to volunteers during previous DHS VF deployments, not OAW deployments. Nonetheless, the documentation contained all the items specified in the recommendation, including information about preparing for deployment, completing administrative paperwork, and making travel arrangements. We consider these actions responsive to the recommendation, and therefore, it is resolved and closed.



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Appendix A

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

The Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General was established by the *Homeland Security Act of 2002* (Public Law 107-296) by amendment to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*.

We conducted this evaluation to determine DHS' effectiveness recruiting, deploying, and managing the DHS employees detailed to or volunteering at safe havens at U.S. military installations in support of OAW.

To achieve our objective, we conducted interviews with DHS officials detailed to or volunteering at safe havens and directly involved in the oversight and support of the Afghan resettlement effort. We interviewed personnel from DHS components and DHS HQ, and we met with staff at safe havens, including DOD representatives.

We conducted site visits at six of the eight safe havens to understand the specific roles and responsibilities of DHS employees. We traveled to Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey; Fort McCoy, Wisconsin; Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico; Fort Bliss, Texas; Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia; and Fort Pickett, Virginia, to observe and evaluate DHS detailed and volunteer employee functions. We determined which safe havens to visit based on the UCG's prioritization order for the closing of safe havens and visited those scheduled to remain open the longest.

We also reviewed and analyzed DHS and UCG directives, guidance, policies, procedures, documents, personnel rosters, and communications related to the recruitment, deployment, and management of the DHS employees detailed to or volunteering at safe havens to support OAW. We examined databases and other methods used to track and manage DHS detailed and volunteer employees. To further understand the DHS VF processes and procedures, we disseminated a questionnaire to the VF component coordinators and analyzed the responses.

We conducted this evaluation between November 2021 and January 2022 under the authority of the *Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended*, and according to the *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency.



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Appendix B
DHS Comments to the Draft Report

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528



**Homeland
Security**

July 12, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: Joseph V. Cuffari, Ph.D.
Inspector General

FROM: Jim H. Crumacker, CIA CFE
Director
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

SUBJECT: Management Response to Draft Report: “DHS Did Not Adequately or Efficiently Deploy Its Employees in Support of Operation Allies Welcome” (Project No. 22-004-ISP-DHS)

JIM H
CRUMPACKER

Digitally signed by
JIM H CRUMPACKER
Date: 2022.07.12
07:33:38 -04'00'

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS or the Department) appreciates the work of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

DHS leadership is pleased to note OIG’s recognition of the Department’s deployment of approximately 300 personnel from DHS Components to international locations to conduct processing, screening, and vetting in coordination with the Department of Defense, Department of State and other Federal agencies in support of Operation Allies Refuge (OAR). OIG also:

- (1) Noted that the DHS Volunteer Force (VF) was able to deploy volunteers overseas and facilitate the arrival of the first of these volunteers onsite within three days of being requested, and
- (2) Acknowledged DHS’s responsibility as the lead Federal agency coordinating efforts across the Federal Government to resettle evacuees from Afghanistan as part of Operation Allies Welcome (OAW).

DHS remains committed to rapidly deploying its employees in future operations and continuing to enhance preparedness.

In addition, it is important to note that a number of Components across the Department fulfill vital roles directly safeguarding our nation every day, all of which have missions and priorities that must be carefully balanced. This makes the number of DHS employees that responded to the call to support the humanitarian missions of OAR and OAW with selfless dedication and the compassion and professionalism that characterize



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our workforce all the more remarkable. For example, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's support and expertise, most notably the work of the Senior Response Official (SRO), was essential to ensuring the appropriate response structure and interagency coordination was in place and functioning effectively.

Further, the U.S. Coast Guard provided dozens of highly-trained incident management personnel to assist the SRO in establishing the unified coordination structure in the early days of both OAR and OAW, and the Coast Guard reserve continues to this day supporting ongoing operations. DHS Components and Offices also provided numerous senior executives, which served as the field-level Federal Coordinators at each of the Safe Havens, and were essential in DHS successfully welcoming, caring for, and resettling Afghan allies. In addition, U.S. Customs and Border Protection provided resources focused on screening, vetting, and the orderly processing of new arrivals, while U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services ensured Afghan allies received the appropriate documentation in order to maintain national security. While the DHS VF fulfilled a significant role, this was a true whole-of-society effort, which included nongovernmental organizations (especially faith-based and community organizations), state and local governments, as well as other Federal departments and agencies with authorities and funding.

The draft report contained three recommendations, with which the Department concurs. Enclosed find our detailed response to each recommendation. DHS previously submitted technical comments addressing several accuracy, contextual, and other issues under separate cover for OIG's consideration.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you again in the future.

Enclosure



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**Enclosure: Management Response to Recommendations
Contained in Project No. 22-004-ISP-DHS**

OIG recommended that the DHS Secretary:

Recommendation 1: Develop and implement a framework for directing DHS components to deploy staff to support missions, including non-centrally funded, unplanned, or emergency operations, for which DHS resources are needed.

Response: Concur. DHS leadership recognizes that there is always room to improve its programs, operations, and other activities. The DHS Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO), in conjunction with other DHS entities (as appropriate), will review existing processes and procedures to determine what adjustments may be necessary to deploy volunteers more efficiently and effectively in the future. Estimated Completion Date (ECD): May 31, 2023.

Recommendation 2: Develop and implement a volunteer deployment strategy that includes provisions for supporting volunteers, regardless of funding source.

Response: Concur. The DHS CHCO, in consultation with the DHS Acting Chief Financial Officer, and other relevant DHS entities, will develop and implement a volunteer deployment strategy that includes provisions for supporting volunteers regardless of funding source. ECD: May 31, 2023.

OIG recommended that DHS Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer:

Recommendation 3: Develop and implement training for DHS employee volunteers to prepare for deployment, including but not limited to training on how to complete administrative paperwork and make travel arrangements.

Response: Concur. As currently constituted, the DHS Volunteer Force Coordination Cell (VFCC) already provides training for all volunteers that is responsive to this recommendation, including pre-deployment briefs, informational emails, on-site orientation, and weekly ongoing training. DHS VFCC sector leads also provide onsite training at all volunteer sites on a wide variety of topics, including that related to proper timekeeping of hours worked, which will continue to be an integral part of the DHS VFCC operations. DHS provided OIG with documentation corroborating these efforts under a separate cover on June 2, 2022. DHS requests that OIG consider this recommendation resolved and closed, as implemented.



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Appendix C
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Appendix D
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