



This document contains ASISTA's notes from the USCIS stakeholder engagement. These notes have not been reviewed by USCIS and all content is paraphrased.

Overview of the New Humanitarian, Adjustment, Removing Conditions and Travel Documents ([HART](#)) Service Center

Date of Engagement: April 20, 2023

Speakers:

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ASISTA Notes:

USCIS Presentation

1. Overview of HART
 - a. HART is the 6th service center in the Service Center Operations Directorate (SCOPS) & was created in response to backlogs and extensive processing times.
 - b. Reassignment of existing employees & enhancement of 330 positions to support this initiative – total center size will be 480 to begin with
 - i. 100% virtual service center
 - ii. No physical location
 - iii. Across multiple time zones
 - c. HART utilizes existing service centers for support within a hybrid approach
 - i. File pick-up & drop-off
 - ii. IT support
 - iii. Records

- iv. Contractor support
 - d. Fiscal footprint benefits
 - i. No/reduced file storage
 - ii. No physical space needed to house employees
 - e. Focused on specific humanitarian workloads:
 - i. I-360 VAWA
 - ii. I-601A
 - iii. I-730
 - iv. I-918 BFD
 - v. Note: as HART increase staffings, we will look at adding additional humanitarian form types
 - f. Paper-based, hybrid model until fully digital. HART is currently a hybrid center, which means it has no designated facility. The 4 humanitarian workloads listed above are currently all paper-based forms. The goal is to digitize these forms to be 100% electronic. However, there is no timeline for when e-filing will be the norm.
 - g. Nothing has changed with regards to submitting inquiries. Continue using existing mechanisms
2. FY23 USCIS Strategic Plan
- a. HART service center supports USCIS goals & priorities
 - i. Promotes quality adjudications while reducing processing times & increases capacity to respond to ever-growing humanitarian mission
 - ii. Enhances organizational capability for efficient processing of humanitarian caseloads
 - iii. Digitization of workload will improve timely case processing
3. Phased Approach for Hiring
- a. Phased approach for hiring
 - b. 4 hiring phases – will ultimately grow to 480 positions
 - i. Phases 1 & 2 consisted of permanent internal reassignments & leadership details within SCOPS & was completed 1/29/2023
 - ii. Phase 3 consisted of soliciting for voluntary permanent internal reassignments and is currently in progress, “pending enter on duty dates and training.” This phase is nearly complete. Most of the on-boarding took place mid-March to mid-April 2023
 - iii. Phase 4 began in early April with posting of both agency-wide & public [job notices](#)
 - 1. Hiring is expected to be completed by end of FY23, bringing staffing levels to 60-85% authorized levels
 - 2. Employees must live within 4 hours of a service center that services HART: Irving, TX (TSC); Lincoln, NE (NSC); Essex Junction, VT (VSC); Arlington, VA (Potomac Service Center)
 - c. Phase 5 will include hiring all support & adjudicative personal, including supervisory positions & analysts
 - d. Anticipate that, by the end of FY24, staffing levels will be at 95-98% of authorized levels

4. Benefits to Stakeholders
 - a. Specially trained/dedicated workforce will improve quality of processing for humanitarian cases, resulting in stabilizing vulnerable populations & reunifying families
 - b. New efficiencies result in better customer service for those form types
 - c. Prioritize public engagement with humanitarian stakeholders (future engagements in late summer/early fall; quarterly “touchpoint” meetings in FY24)
 - d. Improve services in partnership with community groups
 - e. HART will still continue to coordinate with existing service centers to receive support services to including customer service, thus, stakeholders will continue to use existing channels
5. Safe Address: Updated Guidance
 - a. On 4/11/23, USCIS issued [Policy Manual update](#), providing guidance on mailing address & adjudication procedures for victim-based & non-victim based forms, filed for 8 USC § 1367 protected persons
 - b. Guidance is **effective on 7/11/2023**
 - c. [Feedback](#) on this update **requested by 5/22/2023**
 - d. Policy update:
 - i. Supports victim-centered approach by ensuring 8 USC § 1367-protected persons have control over the mailing address used by USCIS
 - ii. Creates uniform agency guidance on mailing procedures for victim-based & non-victim-based forms filed by protected persons

Q&A Portion

1. Is there a plan for I-914 & related apps to be transferred to HART? If so, what is the anticipated timeline?
 - a. Response: What we’re doing now is focused on digitizing form types HART is currently working on. By focusing on just these 4 workloads, HART is building its foundation & establishing its processes. As HART evolves, we will evaluate when it’s appropriate to incorporate additional humanitarian workloads. We don’t have an anticipated timeline for this change at this moment for any additional form types.
2. With the opening of the new HART service center, what are anticipated processing times for each category of case that HART will handle?
 - a. Response: We can’t provide anticipated case processing times for the associated workloads at this moment. It takes time to complete the phased hiring process. We will continue to provide updates to processing times on the USCIS website. Once HART is sufficiently staffed, we anticipate being able to report meaningful case processing times for this workload. You should see improvements in processing times as HART continues to be staffed up.
3. Will the PowerPoint from today’s engagement be shared?
 - a. Response: Yes, it will be shared on the USCIS reading room page shortly following this engagement.

4. Will pending cases be transferred to the new HART service center and will the office work through the backlogs or only be working on newly-filed cases?
 - a. Response: Pending caseloads were transferred to the responsibility of HART from brick and mortar service centers previously responsible for adjudicating them. HART will continue to work on pending cases and process new filings, as they are submitted to USCIS. Individuals who will apply for benefits don't need to take new action, other than following filing instructions. So HART took existing work and is taking new work that comes in for the 4 forms identified.
5. What are the office's goals regarding the backlog in U Bona Fide Determination (BFD) adjudications? Can you estimate how long it will take HART to reduce U BFD adjudication time to under 1 year?
 - a. Response: Employees that were identified by other service centers as subject matter experts on U BFDs were permanently reassigned and are working on reducing that backlog. We are continuing to explore additional ways to reduce backlog, including digitizing paper files. It's too early to meaningfully estimate timeframes while HART is building up its workforce. Once sufficiently staffed, we anticipate being able to report meaningful estimates for case processing times in this workload
6. How do current staffing levels at HART compare to levels at other units?
 - a. Response: We have funding for 330 additional positions, in addition to 150 reassignments (mostly from officers working on the existing workloads). So, at launch, we were similar to brick & mortar humanitarian units.
6. Regarding address changes, will any current filing addresses change, based on the establishment of HART? If so, we recommend a grace period of at least 30 days for any changes.
 - a. Response: **The transition to HART will not impact current filing instructions. Continue to follow filing instructions as indicated on the USCIS webpage for each form type.** Any future changes to filing locations will be posted to the page for each form and via USCIS alerts, and a 30 day grace period will be considered..
7. What is USCIS doing to fund HART operations?
 - a. Response: HART is funded the same as the other service centers, from application service fees.
8. What special training are adjudicators at HART receiving? Does it include the "any credible evidence" standard and/or awareness of survivor-related issues?
 - a. Response: Adjudicators have and will continue to receive robust specialized training historically provided to officers to ensure consistent adjudications. This includes training on eligibility and evidence requirements. Also on 8 USC § 1367 and vicarious trauma training as appropriate for this kind of work. We will continue providing this training for those assigned at HART. We appreciate those in the field offering their expertise for training on these matters and will be engaging in the future.
9. Is HART currently processing forms for VAWA? If not, when will it start processing them and from which service center will it process? How will one know if their case is being processed at HART?

- a. Response: Yes to adjudicating VAWA I-360s. Since January 28th or so, they've been adjudicated by HART and no other center. We partner with other service centers to receive services and report, this includes pickup and drop-off of work. So, HART employees stop in to VSC to pick up and drop off work and, for location codes, we're still using VSC, since they are physical files. So, the case is located physically at VSC, but HART officers are adjudicating it.
10. Will HART be exclusively processing those four case types? Or will some remain at the other service centers, as well?
 - a. Response: It's essentially a portfolio created around a humanitarian effort. We took the work with the people. For those form types, all the work and people working on it got moved into the portfolio. Since the grouping of people is in a virtual environment, cases will still have EAC/TSC receipt numbers on it – because the case physically resides at that service center – until it becomes a digital/electronic format. That means, if it's moved into ELIS (Electronic Immigration System), there will be IOE receipt numbers at that point, just like any other case that goes into ELIS and is not tied to a specific location.
11. What are the plans for keeping track of paper documents in this virtual realm?
 - a. Response: Keeping track of paper documents is our life. We have done this for decades. We have been tracking digital files for about a decade or so. We still track through electronic means – whether it's a piece of paper or an electronic file. So no worries there. As we continue to shift to a digital world, we'll have more tools to know where things are in the process.
12. If a case is processed by HART, how will we know it? Will correspondence indicate that it comes from HART or another service center? We've been seeing action on I-730s & I-918s, but there's no indication that it's from HART.
 - a. Response: Happy to hear you're seeing action. That means we're doing our job. Codes are still tied to other service centers. So employees are dropping off and picking up work at physical centers: I-918s are picked up & dropped off at VSC and NSC; I-730s at TSC; I-601As are at Potomac Service Center. Until it's electronic, you're going to see location codes associated with those service centers, depending on where the work is coming from.
13. Given that HART was operational with 30% staffing levels as of February 28th, is currently staffed with 150 positions, and through this phased approach will ultimately grow to 480 positions, what supplemental resources are necessary for USCIS to reach this goal?
 - a. Response: USCIS performs an annual affordability analysis to determine spending for the upcoming fiscal year. HART positions are affordable. USCIS still needs a fee rule to cover all its costs.
14. Please describe how HART's staffing structure will manage the case types – e.g., will there be an equal breakdown of how many staff handle each type of cases? Will it be prioritized by backlog size? Particularly vulnerable cases? Other factors?
 - a. Response: We have currently reassigned employees identified as subject matter experts by other service centers and who were already working on these form types. Positions were identified based on what resources were needed to tackle the

backlog, based on form type. We will continue to evaluate and adjust as needed to make sure each form type is adjudicated in a timely manner.

15. Given that the acronym HART literally includes Adjustment in it, why are Adjustment of Status (I-485s) cases not a focus in this effort? Can it be expanded to include them?
 - a. Response: Ultimately, the goal is to bring additional humanitarian workloads to HART. For now, we have the four workloads that we have chosen to focus on.
16. How will staff working from home process the hundreds of thousands of paper filings that are currently at NSC and VSC (is there an enormous digitization plan in progress / do you plan to provide the option to e-file these applications in the near future and, if so, how soon)?
 - a. Response: At this time, employees assigned to HART will have paper files and must be within 4 hours of the service center to pick up and drop off the file. The goal is to have digitized files. We are working on multiple strategies simultaneously (for example, scanning all files upon receipt). It depends on the form type and the resources to support each development. There is no timeline right now for what form types may be offered via e-filing.
17. Also, regarding paper filings, if they are sent to a particular service center, is that the service center where hotline inquiries should be directed?
 - a. Response: The answer is yes. For these, HART will continue to coordinate with existing service centers to include support for customer service. So continue using existing channels. Any changes will be sent via USCIS alerts, gov delivery notices, and the USCIS website.
18. What precautions are being taken to make sure there are no lost files in transit?
 - a. Response: Remote work/telework is not new for the agency. Each individual, regardless of whether it's a safe address case or "run-of-the-mill" case, is treated with the utmost care and concern. We have a process to manifest everything out of the service center and in a person's home. They have to be with the file 24/7 or keep it in a locked box/file so it's not accessible. During transportation, it's kept in a locked trunk or car and they are not allowed to stop anywhere between point A and point B. We have been doing this for decades. We have tons of precautions in place for files at the office and in remote work locations.

ASISTA remains hopeful that HART adjudications will help address the extensive and growing backlogs, particularly for I-918 bona fide determinations. ASISTA will continue monitoring the situation and encourages practitioners to report any issues they experience.

Stay in Touch with ASISTA!

As always, for case-specific questions or requests for assistance, ASISTA members, certain OVW LAV grantees and STOP subgrantees, and potential grantees can make an appointment for technical assistance at <https://asistahelp.org/technical-assistance/>.

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