

Refugee Security Screening Process



1 Refugee Status



Individuals register with The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and their biodata is collected to determine if they qualify as a refugee under international law.

2 U.S. Referral



Refugees are then referred to any of the twenty-eight resettlement countries. They do not get to choose. Refugees that meet one of the criteria for resettlement in the U.S. is referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USARP) by the UNHCR.

3 Data Collection



Resettlement Support Centers (RSC) contracted by the U.S. Department of State (DOS) conduct a preparatory interview in addition to gathering personal data and background information of refugees for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in-person interview.

4 Security Checks



The State Department checks all refugee names provided by the RSC through a standard CLASS (Consular Lookout and Support System) name check that contains watch-list information.

5 Additional Data Review



Certain refugees undergo Security Advisory Opinion (SAO) that require a positive SAO clearance from several U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies in order to continue the resettlement process.

6 Inter-Agency Check



Refugees that meet the minimum age requirement undergo an Inter-Agency Check (IAC) conducted by the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC).

IAC's are considered a "recurrent vetting" process; this means the USCIS will be notified of any new derogatory information up until refugee's travel to the United States.

7 Syria Enhanced Review



Syrian refugees undergo review by a Refugee Affairs Division officer at USCIS headquarters. If certain criteria is met, the case is referred to the Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate (FDNS) where a report is compiled based on open-source and classified research.

8 USCIS Interview



All refugee applicants over the age of fourteen are interviewed by a USCIS officer. Each interview is face-to-face and detailed. Based on the interview the DHS officer will determine if the individual qualifies as a refugee and is admissible under U.S. law. Fingerprints and photos are gathered at this stage also.

9 Approval



If individuals qualify as a refugee and meet other U.S. admission criteria, the USCIS will conditionally approve the refugee's application and submit it to the U.S. Department of State for final processing.

Conditional approvals become final when the results of all security checks are received and cleared.

10 Fingerprints & Pictures



Fingerprints and photos collected are checked by the FBI's Next Generation Identification System, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS), and the U.S. Department of Defense's ABIS.

11 Medical Screening



All refugee applicants with conditional approval undergo medical screenings. Screenings are conducted by the International Organization for Migration or by U.S. Embassy designated physicians and ensure refugees have no communicable diseases.

12 Sponsor Agency

All refugees are assigned to Voluntary Agencies in the U.S. that then place refugees with local partner agencies.

13 Cultural Orientation



Refugees are offered cultural orientation when waiting for final processing. These orientations provide additional information about the U.S. to prepare them for their journey and initial resettlement.

14 U.S. Admission



Once at one of the five U.S. airports designated as ports of entry for refugee admission, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reviews arriving refugee information and conducts additional security checks with the National Targeting Center-Passenger program and the Transportation Security Administration's Secure Flight Program. This ensures that arriving refugees are the same individuals that were screened and approved for admission into the U.S.

Additional Resources

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
<https://www.uscis.gov/refugeescreening>

Human Rights First
<http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/refugee-resettlement-security-screening-information>

U.S. Department of State
<https://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/admissions/>

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The information on this document was gathered from the USCRI and Refugee Council USA.