

The Refugee Processing and Screening System

How refugee cases are processed and screened before refugees are resettled in the United States.



Refugee Resettlement

The United States has long been a global leader in resettling the world's most vulnerable people. Since 1975, the United States has resettled more than 3.2 million refugees fleeing from war and persecution.

In Fiscal Year 2016, the United States welcomed nearly 85,000 refugees. Roughly 72% of these refugees were women and children.

01 Registration and Data Collection

Refugees in need of protection apply for refugee resettlement. Usually, refugees are referred by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR), which collects initial documentation and biographical information.

This information is transferred to a Department of State-funded Resettlement Support Center (RSC). The RSC conducts an in-depth interview with the applicant, enters the applicant's documentation into the Department of State's Worldwide Refugee Admission Processing System (WRAPS), cross-references and verifies the data, and sends the information necessary to conduct a background check to other U.S. agencies.



02 Security Checks Begin



U.S. national security agencies, including the National Counterterrorism Center, FBI, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Defense, and the Department of State, as well as the intelligence community, begin screening the applicant using the data transmitted from the RSCs.

The screening checks for security threats, including connections to known bad actors, and past immigration or criminal violations. For Syrian applicants, DHS conducts an additional enhanced review.

Refugees are screened more carefully than any other type of traveler to the U.S.

03 DHS Interview

Security screening results from each agency are transmitted back to DHS and the State Department. Specially trained DHS officers review initial screening results, conduct in-person interviews in the host country, and collect biometric data from the applicants.

The DHS interview confirms the information collected from the previous interviews conducted by the State Department's RSCs. Additional interviews are conducted as new information arises. With each interview, data is verified in person and in WRAPS.

If new information emerges during the interview, the information is entered into WRAPS and additional security checks are conducted. If inconsistencies emerge at any point, the case is put on hold until the inconsistencies are resolved. Once all interviews and checks are complete, DHS adjudicates the case, the decision is entered into WRAPS, and the process continues.



04 Biometric Security Checks



Fingerprints collected by U.S. government employees are stored in a DHS database and screened against:

- The FBI biometric database;
- The DHS biometric database, which includes watch-list information and previous immigration encounters in the U.S. and overseas; and
- The U.S. Department of Defense database, which includes fingerprints obtained around the world.

These fingerprint screening results are reviewed by DHS. Cases with any problematic results are denied. Otherwise, the process continues.

05 Cultural Orientation and Medical Check



Cultural Orientation

Applicants complete a class designed to teach them about American culture, customs and practices.

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Medical Check

All refugees approved by DHS undergo a medical screening to identify diseases of public health significance.

The results of the medical examination are entered into WRAPS. If a case is cleared after the medical check, the process continues.

06 Assignment to Domestic Resettlement Locations and Travel



Every week, representatives from each of the nine domestic resettlement agencies meet and review applicant information transmitted from the RSCs via WRAPS to determine where to resettle each refugee.

Once these placement decisions are made, the placement is recorded in WRAPS, and the refugee is notified of their destination.



The International Organization for Migration (IOM) books travel for the refugees.

Prior to entry in the U.S., applicants are subject to screening from U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and the Transportation Security Administration's Secure Flight Program.

Applicants with no security concerns continue their travel.

07 ARRIVAL IN THE U.S.

Applicants arrive in the United States, where representatives from nine domestic resettlement agencies welcome refugees at the airport and begin the process of helping them settle in to their new communities.



In Fiscal Year 2016, the U.S. welcomed 84,995 refugees from around the world.



THE SCREENING PROCESS

FOR REFUGEE ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES

1

MANY REFUGEE APPLICANTS IDENTIFY THEMSELVES TO THE U.N. REFUGEE AGENCY, UNHCR. UNHCR, THEN:

- Collects identifying documents
- Performs initial assessment
 - + Collects biodata: name, address, birthday, place of birth, etc.
 - + Collects biometrics: iris scans (for Syrians, and other refugee populations in the Middle East)
- Interviews applicants to confirm refugee status and the need for resettlement
 - + Initial information checked again

Only applicants who are strong candidates for resettlement move forward (less than 1% of global refugee population).

2

APPLICANTS ARE RECEIVED BY A FEDERALLY-FUNDED RESETTLEMENT SUPPORT CENTER (RSC):

- Collects identifying documents
- Creates an applicant file
- Compiles information to conduct biographic security checks

3

BIOGRAPHIC SECURITY CHECKS START WITH ENHANCED INTERAGENCY SECURITY CHECKS:

- U.S. security agencies screen the candidate, including:
 - + National Counterterrorism Center/ Intelligence Community
 - + FBI
 - + Department of Homeland Security
 - + State Department

REFUGEES ARE SUBJECT TO THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF SECURITY CHECKS of any category of traveler to the United States.

The screening looks for indicators, like:

- + Information that the individual is a security risk
- + Connections to known bad actors
- + Outstanding warrants/immigration or criminal violations

DHS conducts an enhanced review of Syrian cases, which may be referred to USCIS Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate for review. Research that is used by the interviewing officer informs lines of question related to the applicant's eligibility and credibility.

This process is repeated any time new information is provided, such as a previously used name or different phone number. Otherwise, the process continues.

4

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS)/USCIS INTERVIEW:

Interviews are conducted by USCIS Officers specially trained for interviews

Fingerprints are collected and submitted (biometric check)

Re-interviews can be conducted if fingerprint results or new information raises questions. If new biographic information is identified by USCIS at an interview, additional security checks on the information are conducted. USCIS may place a case on hold to do additional research or investigation. Otherwise, the process continues.

5

BIOMETRIC SECURITY CHECKS:

Applicant's fingerprints are taken by U.S. government employees

- + Fingerprints are screened against the FBI's biometric database
- + Fingerprints are screened against the DHS biometric database, containing watch-list information and previous immigration encounters in the U.S. and overseas.
- + Fingerprints are screened against the U.S. Department of Defense biometric database, which includes fingerprint records captured in Iraq and other locations.



X

IF NOT ALREADY HALTED, THIS IS THE END POINT FOR CASES WITH SECURITY CONCERNS.
Otherwise, the process continues.

6

MEDICAL CHECK:

The need for medical screening is determined

X

THIS IS THE END POINT FOR CASES DENIED DUE TO MEDICAL REASONS.
Refugees may be provided medical treatment for communicable diseases such as tuberculosis.

7

CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND ASSIGNMENT TO DOMESTIC RESETTLEMENT LOCATIONS:

Applicants complete cultural orientation classes.

An assessment is made by a U.S.-based non-governmental organization to determine the best resettlement location for the candidate(s). Considerations include:



Family; candidates with family in a certain area may be placed in that area.



Health; a candidate with asthma may be matched to certain regions.

A location is chosen.

RECURRENT VETTING:

Throughout this process, pending applications continue to be checked against terrorist databases, to ensure new, relevant terrorism information has not come to light. If a match is found, that case is paused for further review.

IF THERE IS DOUBT
about whether
an applicant poses
a security risk, they
will not be admitted.

X

Applicants who continue to have no flags continue the process.

8

TRAVEL:

- International Organization for Migration books travel
- Prior to entry in the United States, applicants are subject to:
 - + Screening from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center-Passenger
 - + The Transportation Security Administration's Secure Flight Program

x

THIS IS THE END POINT FOR SOME APPLICANTS.
Applicants who have no flags continue the process.



9

U.S. ARRIVAL:

- All refugees are required to apply for a green card within a year of their arrival to the United States, which triggers:
 - + Another set of security procedures with the U.S. government.



REFUGEES ARE WOVEN INTO THE RICH FABRIC OF AMERICAN SOCIETY!