



Screening Procedures for Syrian Refugees

Compiled by the House Democratic Caucus

Syrian refugees must meet a higher standard for entry and resettlement than any other immigrant or visitor to the United States. The background screening process is designed to ensure that refugees do not pose a threat of any kind to the communities where they may ultimately resettle.

Before admission to the U.S., refugees undergo an extensive interviewing, screening and security clearance process. Multiple federal agencies are involved in screening including the FBI and its Terrorist Screening Center, Department of Homeland Security, the National Counterterrorism Center, the State Department, and the Department of Defense.

The screening process averages about 15 months but can take up to 3 years. Recently arrived Syrian refugee families have often waited for resettlement to the U.S. for several years prior to their arrival. They are typically welcomed and resettled into local communities that are ready and waiting to provide them support for starting their new lives.

Every Syrian refugee must go through the following process:

UNHCR Interview and Referral While Abroad

- U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees first registers refugees abroad, interviews them, takes biometric data and background information. UNHCR does this through a Resettlement Support Center (RSC).
- RSCs (who are contracted NGOs), under cooperative agreements with State, carry out administrative and processing functions, such as file preparation and storage, data collection, and out-processing activities.
- Screening involves numerous biographic checks initiated by RSCs and reviewed/resolved by USCIS/DHS.
- Only those who pass the U.N. assessment are referred to the U.S. government for security screening and processing.

U.S. Screening While Abroad and Prior to Approval

- The U.S. government then conducts its own extremely rigorous screening process. This screening process is conducted entirely by federal government employees. No contractors are used in this process.
- Screening includes health checks, repeated biometric checks, several layers of biographical and background screening, and in-person interviews by specially-trained officers.
- Multiple agencies are involved, including the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center, the State Department, the Department of Homeland Security, the National Counterterrorism Center, the Department of Defense and U.S. intelligence agencies such as NSC.
 - Department of Homeland Security Interviews
 - Consular Lookout and Watch List Check/ Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS)
 - Security Advisory Opinions (SAOs) from Intelligence and Other Agencies
 - National Counterterrorism Center Interagency Checks (IACs) with Intelligence Agency Support
 - DHS Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT fka USVISIT) and FBI Next Generation Identification (NGI) Biometric Checks
 - Department of Defense Forensics and Biometrics Agency's (DFBA) Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS) Biometric Screening Check
 - DHS-USCIS Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate (FDNS) Check
- DHS has added an additional country-specific layer of review for Syrian refugee applications, which includes extra screening for national security risks.

U.S. Screening While Abroad After Approval and Prior to Traveling to U.S. for Admission

- Additional screening process may be required to be conducted again prior to travel and admission to the U.S.
- CBP receives flight travel manifests 8 days before scheduled travel to the U.S. CBP performs vetting of the subjects before they arrive at a port of entry.

U.S. Screening at U.S. Ports of Entry

- CBP conducts both additional background checks and interviews of refugees upon arrival at a U.S. Port of Entry.
- Screening through Ports of Entry occurs through DHS-U.S. Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center-Passenger (NTC-P) and the Transportation Security Administration's Secure Flight program.