

# REFUGEE SECURITY SCREENING PROCESS



## 26 STEPS TO ARRIVAL IN THE U.S.

- 1** The United Nations (U.N.) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) identifies and determines who among migrants fleeing violent situations qualifies as a refugee.
  - *A refugee is someone forced to flee his or her country and cannot return because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.*
- 2** Applicants register with UNHCR, which collects identifying documents; biodata, such as name, date of birth, and place of birth; and biometrics, most commonly an iris scan.
- 3** UNHCR performs an initial assessment and interviews applicants to confirm refugee status and the need for resettlement. Initial information is checked again.
  - Only applicants who are strong candidates fit for resettlement move forward in the process (less than 1% of the global refugee population).
- 4** Approved applicants who fulfill criteria to be considered a refugee under United States law and meet UNHCR resettlement requirements are referred to the U.S. for resettlement and processing priority qualifications.

Priority qualifications include:

  - **Vulnerable Populations**—Women, children, single mothers, elderly, medical needs
  - **Family Reunification**—In this case, an Affidavit of Relationship is filed, DNA testing is completed, and the relationship is verified before it can begin processing.
  - **Imminent threat to life**
- 5** UNHCR-referred applicants are received by a Resettlement Support Center (RSC), contracted through and operated by the U.S. Department of State's (DOS) Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM).
- 6** An RSC official conducts a preliminary interview with the applicant and compiles information for the security clearance process conducted by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This includes the collection of identifying documents. Research that is used by the interviewing officer informs lines of question related to the applicant's eligibility and credibility.
  - RSCs must maintain full compliance with PRM's Guidance on the Treatment of Refugee Records.



- 7** The U.S. biographic and biometric security checks begin with enhanced interagency security checks. Refugee applicants are vetted against law enforcement, intelligence community, and other relevant databases to help confirm the applicant's identity and check for any criminal or other derogatory information.
  - Security screenings conducted through the DHS, DOS, Department of Defense (DOD), National Counterterrorism Center, FBI and CIA.
  - The screening looks for indicators such as:
    - Information that the individual is a security risk
    - Connections to known bad actors
    - Outstanding warrants/immigration or criminal violations

## Biographic checks

- 8** First biographic check: Applicants' names are checked against the DOS Consular Lookout and Support System, initiated at the time of prescreening by the RSC. This clearance is good for 15 months. Enhanced interagency security checks also take place at this time.
- 9** Second biographic check: If applicants meet certain criteria, the RSC requests Security Advisory Opinions (SAO) from the law enforcement and intelligence communities. These cases require a positive SAO clearance from a number of U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies in order to continue the resettlement process. The SAO clearance is good for 15 months.
- 10** Third biographic check: If applicants are within a designated age range, the National Counterterrorism Center conducts an interagency check, or IAC. Initially, the IAC was required only for Iraqi applicants, but is now required for all qualified refugee applicants.
  - Refugees receive more screening than any other entrants into the United States.
- 11** All refugee applicants have an in-person interview by an officer from the DHS U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). A specially trained officer will travel to the country of asylum (or in some cases, origin) to conduct an interview with each refugee applicant being considered for resettlement and determine if the individual qualifies as a refugee and is admissible under U.S. law.



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## 26 STEPS TO ARRIVAL IN THE U.S.

### Biometric checks ✓

- 12** First biometric check: A trained U.S. government employee takes applicants' fingerprints and photographs. Fingerprints are screened against the FBI's Next Generation Identification system.
- 13** Second biometric check: Applicants' fingerprints are screened against the DHS Automated Biometric Identification System, which contains watch-list information and previous immigration encounters in the U.S. and overseas.
- 14** Third biometric check: If applicants are within a designated age range, fingerprints are screened against the DOD Automated Biometric Identification System, which includes fingerprint records captured in Iraq.
  - 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.
  - If not already halted, this is the end point for cases with security concerns. Otherwise, the process continues.
- 15** A Refugee Affairs Division officer reviews refugee applications at USCIS headquarters.
- 16** If the USCIS officer finds that the individual qualifies as a refugee and meets other U.S. admission criteria, the officer will conditionally approve the refugee's application for resettlement and submit it to the RSC for final processing. Conditional approvals become final once the results of all security checks have been received and cleared.
- 17** All refugee applicants are required to undergo health and medical screenings to ensure that those with a contagious disease do not enter the U.S. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) or a physician designated by the U.S. Embassy conducts the medical screening.
  - This is the end point for cases denied due to medical reasons. Refugees may be provided medical treatment for communicable diseases such as tuberculosis.
- 18** Refugee applicants approved for resettlement complete cultural orientation classes while awaiting final processing, to prepare them for their journey to and initial resettlement in the U.S.
- 19** Approved refugee applicants are assigned to one of nine U.S.-based nonprofit resettlement agencies, who provide assurances for reception and placement services.
- 20** The resettlement agency then assigns the refugee individual or family to one of their resettlement sites across the U.S. An assessment is made to determine the best resettlement location for the candidate. Considerations include family (e.g., candidates with family in a certain area may be placed in that area) and health (e.g., a candidate with asthma may be matched to certain regions).
  - There are two resettlement agency affiliate offices in Utah: The International Rescue Committee and Catholic Community Services.
- 21** Applicants undergo a second interagency security check to make sure no new information disqualifies them for admittance to the U.S. 
- 22** The IOM books travel for the refugee individual or family to the U.S.
- 23** Prior to entry to the U.S., applicants are subject to screening from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center-Passenger and the Transportation Security Administration's Secure Flight program. This screening ensures that the arriving refugee is the same person who was approved for admission to the U.S.
  - This is the end point for some applicants. Applicants who have no flags continue the process.
- 24** Upon arrival in the U.S., Utah's resettlement agencies work closely with resettled refugees to connect them with housing, employment and other resources:
  - Health check performed 30 days after resettlement
  - Case management for 2 years
  - Local partners help them integrate into society to develop positive relationships with Utah's community
- 25** Resettlement agencies are required to report any suspected fraud in any refugee case to both DOS PRM and DHS USCIS and assist the refugee in updating address changes with DHS as required within 10 days of a move.
- 26** All refugees are required to apply for a green card within a year of their arrival to the U.S., which triggers another set of security procedures with the U.S. government.

For more information, please contact the Utah Department of Workforce Services Refugee Services Office:  
Gerald Brown, State Refugee Coordinator  
801-703-4845 • geraldbrown@utah.gov  
[refugee.utah.gov](http://refugee.utah.gov)

#### Sources:

- Center for American Progress (<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2015/11/18/125812/infographic-the-screening-process-for-entry-to-the-united-states-for-syrian-refugees/>)
- International Rescue Committee (<http://www.rescue.org/us-program/us-san-diego-ca/vetting-process-refugees>)

- U.S. White House (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/11/20/infographic-screening-process-refugee-entry-united-states>)