

The United States Handpicks and Stringently Screens and Vets Refugees Before They Enter the Country

STAGE ONE:

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees first registers the vast majority of refugees, interviews them, takes biometric data and background information as part of a “Refugee Status Determination” or RSD, a process for determining whether a person is a refugee. Cases are referred to one of 37 resettlement countries, including the United States, for consideration. Refugees do not choose to be resettled or decide which country accepts them. The United States also directly identifies many refugees classified as being of “special humanitarian concern” to the United States.

STAGE TWO:

The U.S. government then conducts its own extremely rigorous screening process involving the following steps, each of which is explained in more detail below:

- **Department of Homeland Security Interviews**
- **Enhanced Review for Syrian Refugees**
- **Consular Lookout and Watch List Checks**
- **Security Advisory Opinions from Law Enforcement & Intelligence Agencies**
- **National Counterterrorism Center Checks with Intelligence Agency Support**
- **DHS and FBI Biometric Checks**
- **Department of Defense Biometric Screening**
- **Additional Vetting via Interpol and Other Countries**
- **Additional Screening on Entry**

- ☑ **Department of Homeland Security Interviews:** Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officers interview refugees in person to determine whether they can be approved for resettlement in the United States. These interviews occur while refugees are still abroad. These officers receive specialized training and intelligence briefings that include comprehensive instruction on fraud detection, interviewing techniques, credibility analysis, and country conditions.
- ☑ **Enhanced Review for Syrian Cases:** DHS has instituted additional layers of review for Syrian refugee applications. Before being scheduled for an interview with a DHS officer, Syrian cases are reviewed at DHS headquarters. All cases that meet certain criteria are referred to the DHS Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate (FDNS) for additional review and research. FDNS conducts open-source and classified research on referred cases and synthesizes an assessment for use by the interviewing officer to inform lines of inquiry. FDNS also engages with law enforcement and the intelligence community for assistance with identity verification and acquisition of additional information.
- ☑ **Consular Lookout and Watch List Check:** Biographic checks are conducted against the State Department’s Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS), including watch list information.
- ☑ **Security Advisory Opinions from Intelligence and Other Agencies:** DHS seeks Security Advisory Opinions (SAOs) from a number of law enforcement and intelligence agencies for refugees from reportedly 11 nationalities and other cases that meet certain criteria.

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- ✓ **National Counterterrorism Center Checks with Intelligence Agency Support:** Interagency Checks, known as “IAC’s,” are conducted with the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) for all refugee applicants within a designated age range, regardless of nationality. In addition, expanded intelligence community support was added to the IAC process in July 2010, and recurrent vetting was added in 2015 so that any derogatory information identified after the initial check has been provided to DHS for appropriate review and action.
- ✓ **DHS and FBI Biometric Checks:** Fingerprints are screened against the vast biometric holdings of the FBI’s Next Generation Identification system and are screened and enrolled in DHS’s Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT). Through IDENT, the applicant’s fingerprints are screened not only against watch list information, but also for previous immigration encounters in the United States and overseas, including cases in which the applicant previously applied for a visa at a U.S. embassy.
- ✓ **Department of Defense Biometric Screening:** Biometric screening is also conducted through the Department of Defense (DOD) Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS). ABIS contains a variety of records, including fingerprint records. ABIS screening now covers all refugee applicants who fall within prescribed age ranges.
- ✓ **Interpol:** The vetting process—including the CLASS and IDENT systems—checks against international intelligence community holdings from Interpol. Interpol’s Foreign Terrorist Fighter database includes detailed identity particulars of individuals provided by 52 countries. Further, Interpol’s Stolen and Lost Travel Documents (SLTD) database includes details of nearly 54 million stolen, lost, blank and other documents.
- ✓ **In addition to Interpol,** the U.S. government maintains separate security and intelligence sharing relationships with many countries, facilitating checks on information gathered on refugees after they initially flee their country.

STAGE THREE:

- ✓ **Medical Screenings:** All refugees approved for resettlement in the U.S. are required to undergo medical screenings conducted by the International Organization for Migration or a physician designated by the U.S. Embassy. This screening ensures that the applicant does not have any communicable diseases that could pose a public health threat, and, as such, prohibit his or her admission to the U.S.
- ✓ **Cultural Orientation:** Refugees approved for resettlement are provided cultural orientation while they await final processing, preparing them for their journey to and initial resettlement in the U.S.
- ✓ **Matching Refugees with a Sponsor Agency:** As part of the USRAP’s public-private partnership, every refugee is assigned to a local resettlement office in the U.S that meets them at the airport, sets up an apartment, and assists them with integration upon arrival to the U.S.

STAGE FOUR:

- ✓ **Additional Screening Checks on Entry:** Before they travel to the United States, refugees are subject to screening conducted by DHS-U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) National Targeting Center and the Transportation Security Administration’s Secure Flight program. In addition, CBP manages the Treasury Enforcement Communications System database, which is an information sharing platform allowing CBP officers to check against a range of connected databases upon an individual’s arrival, including information from Interpol and the Terrorist Screening Center’s Terrorist Screening Database.

For a graphic representation of the above steps, see White House infographic: [The Screening Process for Refugee Entry into the United States](#)

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Refugee Resettlement Advances the United States' National Security Interests and Supports Key U.S. Allies

“[R]esettlement initiatives help advance U.S. national security interests by supporting the stability of our allies and partners that are struggling to host large numbers of refugees.”

— [Letter to Congress from a bipartisan group of the nation's top national security experts](#)

“The process that is currently in place is thorough and robust and, so long as it is fully implemented and not diluted, it will allow us to safely admit the most vulnerable refugees while protecting the American people. Fortunately, these goals are not mutually exclusive.”

— [Janet Napolitano and Michael Chertoff, former DHS secretaries](#)

“A U.S. initiative to resettle Syrian refugees in the United States affirmatively advances U.S. national security interests. Increased resettlement and aid helps protect the stability of a region that is home to U.S. allies.”

— [Ryan Crocker, former ambassador to Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kuwaiti](#)
