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Refugees Entering the U.S. Already Face a Rigorous Vetting Process

By HAEYOUN PARK and LARRY BUCHANAN JAN. 29, 2017

President Trump has suspended entry of all refugees to the United States for 120 days, and he has barred Syrian refugees indefinitely. The current screening process for all refugees involves many layers of security checks before entry into the country, and Syrians were subject to an [additional layer of checks](#). Sometimes, the process, shown below, takes up to two years.

1. **Registration** with the United Nations.
2. **Interview** with the United Nations.
3. **Refugee status** granted by the United Nations.
4. **Referral** for resettlement in the United States.

The United Nations decides if the person fits the definition of a refugee and whether to refer the person to the United States or to another country for resettlement. Only the most vulnerable are referred, accounting for less than 1 percent of refugees worldwide. Some people spend years waiting in refugee camps.

5. **Interview** with State Department contractors.
6. First **background check**.
7. **Higher-level** background check for some.
8. Another **background check**.

The refugee's name is run through law enforcement and intelligence databases for terrorist or criminal history. Some go through a higher-level clearance before they can continue. A third background check was introduced in 2008 for Iraqis but has since been expanded to all refugees ages 14 to 65.

9. First **fingerprint screening**; photo taken.
10. Second **fingerprint screening**.
11. Third **fingerprint screening**.

The refugee's fingerprints are screened against F.B.I. and Homeland Security databases, which contain watch list information and past immigration encounters, including if the refugee previously applied for a visa at a United States embassy. Fingerprints are also checked against those collected by the Defense Department during operations in Iraq.

12. **Case reviewed** at [United States immigration headquarters](#).
13. Some cases referred for **additional review**.

Syrian applicants must undergo these two additional steps. Each is reviewed by a United States Citizenship and Immigration Services refugee specialist. Cases with "national security indicators" are given to the Homeland Security Department's fraud detection unit.

14. **Extensive, in-person interview** with Homeland Security officer.

Most of the interviews with Syrians have been done in Jordan and Turkey.

15. Homeland Security **approval is required**.
16. **Screening** for contagious diseases.
17. **Cultural orientation** class.
18. Matched with an American **resettlement agency**.
19. **Multi-agency security check** before leaving for the United States.

Because of the long amount of time between the initial screening and departure, officials conduct a final check before the refugee leaves for the United States.

20. Final **security check** at an American airport.

Sources: State Department; Department of Homeland Security; Center for American Progress; U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants; Refugee Council USA

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