

[New York Times](#), January 29, 2017

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

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VETTING PROCESS STEPS INCLUDE:

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