13 Security Screening Steps before a refugee is admitted to the United States of America

#1
Registration & Refugee Status Confirmed
The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registers individuals and collects identifying documents, biographic information, and biometric data (such as an iris scan). UNHCR interviews the applicant to determine if the individual qualifies as a refugee under international law.

#2
Referral to the United States
A refugee who meets one of the criteria for resettlement in the United States is referred to the government by UNHCR, a U.S. Embassy, or a trained Non-Governmental Organization. After referral, the screening process takes 18 to 24 months.

#3
Resettlement Support Center
A Resettlement Support Center (RSC), contracted by the U.S. Department of State (DOS), conducts an interview and compiles the refugee's personal data and background information for the security clearance process and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) inperson interview.

#4
Security Screening--CLASS
DOS runs the names of all refugees referred to the United States for resettlement through the Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS), which contains watch-list information.

#5
Security Screening--SAO
Certain refugees undergo additional security review called a Security Advisory Opinion (SAO). These cases require a positive clearance from a number of U.S. law enforcement & intelligence agencies in order to continue the resettlement process.

#6
Security Screening--IAC
The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) conducts an Inter-agency Check (IAC) on applicants within a designated age range. The IAC is a "recurrent vetting" process; thus, USCIS will be notified of any new information identified after the initial check and up until the applicant's travel to the United States.

#7
Security Screening--Syrian Review
Syrian refugees referred to the United States for resettlement are flagged for additional security screening. Before USCIS schedules an interview with the applicant abroad, Syrian applications are reviewed by a Refugee Affairs Division officer at USCIS headquarters.

#8
USCIS In-person Interview
A highly trained USCIS officer will travel to the refugee's location to conduct a detailed, face-to-face interview with the applicant as well as accompanying family over age 14. The officer evaluates the applicant's credibility and considers whether his or her testimony is consistent with country conditions.

#9
Approval
If the necessary criteria are met, the USCIS officer will conditionally approve the refugee's application for resettlement and submit it to DOS for final processing. Conditional approvals become final once the results of all security checks (Steps 4-7, 10) and the medical screening (Step 11) have been received and cleared.

#10
Security Screenings--Fingerprint
With fingerprints and photographs collected by a USCIS officer at the time of the in-person interview, USCIS coordinates three biometric checks on the applicant. The applicant's fingerprints are run through the 1) FBI's Next Generation Identification System; 2) the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Automated Biometric Identification System, which includes watch-list information as well as data on previous immigration encounters in the United States and abroad; 3) the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS).

#11
Medical Screenings
All applicants are required to undergo medical screening 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 United States.

#12
Sponsor Agency & Cultural Orientation
Every refugee is assigned to a resettlement agency in the United States, such as LIRS. LIRS places refugees with a local partner agency, LSS/NCA, that assists them upon arrival to the United States. In addition, refugees are offered cultural orientation while waiting for final processing, preparing them for their journey to and initial resettlement in the United States.

#13
Admission to the United States
Upon arrival at a U.S. airport designated as a port of entry for refugee admissions, a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer will review the refugee's documentation and conduct additional security checks, ensuring that the arriving refugee is the same person who was screened and approved for admission to the United States.