

SECURITY MEASURES IN PLACE FOR REFUGEES RESETTLING IN THE U.S.

Refugees and asylum seekers are not the same. A **refugee** is someone who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside of the country of his nationality and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”²

An **asylum-seeker** is “someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated.”³ When large masses of people flee a country simultaneously, international agencies cannot conduct individual asylum interviews for everyone immediately – this can result in large groups of asylum-seekers being declared “prima facie” refugees; however, all prima facie refugees will go through individual screening prior to being considered for resettlement to the U.S. Because of its geographic location, the U.S. will never experience large numbers of prima facie refugees arriving from Syria.

11 RESETTLEMENT FACTS:

1. Obtaining “refugee” or “prima facie refugee” status **does not** automatically make an individual eligible for resettlement to the U.S.
2. **All** refugees resettling to the U.S. must be recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) **and** be invited by the U.S. Government.
3. To qualify for refugee status, applicants **cannot** have engaged in any fighting or terrorist activities.
4. Security and medical checks **must** be completed **before** a refugee will be considered for resettlement in the U.S.
5. Refugees are **individually** vetted through background check processes involving the Departments of State, Homeland Security, the National Counterterrorism Center, and the FBI amongst other national intelligence agencies.
6. Background checks use biographic and biometric data including finger prints and retina scans.
7. The average background check takes between 18 and 24 months to complete.
8. Syrian refugee applicants **already** have to go through additional security measures known as the “Syria Enhanced Review.”
9. U.S. intelligence agencies rely on their own intelligence and the intelligence of their allies; they do not rely solely on source country data which may be inadequate or unreliable.
10. Since 1975, 3 million refugees have been safely resettled in 180 locations across the U.S.⁴
11. If there is any doubt that an individual poses a security concern, he or she **will not** be selected for resettlement and are removed from further refugee processing.

¹ This fact sheet was compiled by Research Fellows at the UNCG Center for New North Carolinians.

² UNHCR. (2015). The 1951 Refugee Convention. Found at: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html>.

³ UNHCR. (2015). Asylum-Seekers. Found at: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c137.html>.

⁴ U.S. Department of State. (2015). Background Briefing on Refugee Screening and Admissions. Found at: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/11/249613.htm>.