



Statement for the Record Submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on  
Immigration and the National Interest  
Hearing on “Oversight of the Administration’s FY 2017 Refugee Resettlement Program”  
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Chairman Sessions and honorable Subcommittee members, on behalf of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), a national non-profit organization serving refugees and immigrants with a network of over 90 agencies and offices across the nation, I submit our testimony in support of and to provide information on the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program.

For over 100 years, USCRI has protected the rights and addressed the needs of persons in forced or voluntary migration worldwide and supported their transition to a dignified life. We help the uprooted by facilitating and providing direct professional services and promoting the full participation of migrants in community life. USCRI is proud to do this work in the United States because our country is a world leader in providing protection to people who need it. The United States has a long history of showing compassion for victims of persecution, and that is what we must continue to do.

The global refugee crisis requires strong leadership and the United States will inherently make a statement by our presence or absence. We must remember that for many vulnerable refugees, such as torture survivors, women at-risk, and those with complex medical situations, resettlement may be the only option. We must not let fear of terrorist acts cloud our judgment and make us turn our backs on children and families who desperately need our protection. We must not forget our own country was founded by refugees fleeing religious persecution.

USCRI understands the consequences of terrorist acts because we have seen them firsthand in our work with refugees fleeing terrorist persecution. It is important to remember that those who have sought refuge in Europe and the Middle East are also the victims of the brutal actions of ISIS. USCRI shares the Committee’s interest in maintaining the security of the refugee program as our network of agencies and staff work with refugees every day. However, given the current vetting system for refugees referred to the United States for resettlement, we firmly believe that the program can continue without risking our national security.

### **A Solutions-Based Approach**

Based on USCRI’s experience, we have the following recommendations:

1. Support the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program as a safe, humanitarian and foreign policy operation.
2. Increase funding for the Department of Homeland Security to maintain the integrity of security checks.



3. Increase support for the Office of Refugee Resettlement to enhance the integration of newly arrived refugees.

**Continue the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program because it is safe.**

As the former Director of the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement, I am familiar with the security checks that refugees must undergo prior to their arrival to the United States and am confident that our vetting system works. Unlike the current situation in Europe, the United States gets to choose which refugees we admit. Refugees coming in through the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program must pass through a rigorous, multi-layered review aimed at ensuring they will not pose a security risk to our country.

The screening process includes an in-depth, in-person interview by a highly trained Homeland Security officer. In addition, refugees must pass highly rigorous background checks, including biographic and biometric investigations. Information on a refugee is run through Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Defense, and National Counterterrorism Center databases. The security screenings occur at multiple points in the process and there is ongoing, recurring vetting. In addition, Syrian refugees referred to the United State for resettlement must pass through enhanced review procedures implemented by U.S. Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS). Prior to entry, refugees must pass a health screening to ensure they do not have a contagious medical condition. Finally, upon arrival at a U.S. port of entry for refugee admissions, a Customs and Border Protection officer will review the refugee's documentation and conduct additional security checks. If there is doubt about whether an applicant poses a security threat, he or she will not be admitted to the United States.

Less than one percent of refugees are resettled worldwide. There are more than four million Syrian refugees, and the United States has resettled a little over 10,000 Syrian refugees since the Syrian civil war began in 2011. While our resettlement impact has been small, it has demonstrated to other countries the importance of making opportunity for those who cannot return home.

USCRI commends President Obama for his leadership in continuing to support the resettlement of refugees. USCRI stands with the President's statement that:

"The people who are fleeing Syria are the most harmed by terrorism. They are the most vulnerable as a consequence to civil war and strife. We do not close our hearts to these victims of such violence and somehow start equating the issue of refugees with the issue of terrorism."

**Increase funding for the Department of Homeland Security to maintain the integrity of security checks.**



Providing the Department of Homeland Security with increased funding for refugee security screening would allow it to maintain the reliability of the system while reducing inefficiencies in the current process.

Beginning in 2011, additional security checks were implemented for refugees seeking admission to the United States. The additional measures have resulted in severe disruptions in refugee travel, unclear and erroneous results, and a “looping” effect where some checks expire while refugees wait in line for the next step in the process. This has made it nearly impossible for many refugees to travel, exposing them to further harm as they wait. Under the current system, there are three to six different biometric and biographic security checks performed depending on the applicant’s age, gender, and country of nationality. The administration should consolidate security checks to eliminate the looping effect caused as checks expire while others are being conducted. A comprehensive biographic and biometric check acceptable to all agencies would improve efficiency, processing, and the protection of refugees.

In addition, in instances where one individual’s security checks are holding up a family or cross-referenced case, the individual should be informed in order to make realistic decisions about the family’s future. Finally, increasing the number of USCIS interview officers would improve efficiency while allowing the system to maintain its comprehensive nature.

#### **Increase support for the Office of Refugee Resettlement to enhance integration.**

Resettled refugees make significant economic and cultural contributions to their new communities. An increase in funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to ensure adequate, stable, and sustainable resources and programming for newly arrived refugees will only increase the ability of refugees to contribute to our nation.

Specifically, increased funding would allow ORR to further encourage and equip refugees for naturalization by increasing the number of civic engagement programs and access to English language training. Congress should also strongly consider funding the Matching Grant Program at higher levels. The Match Grant program enables refugees and other eligible individuals to become self-sufficient without resorting to federal or state assistance programs. A variety of other programs support newcomers but are without sufficient or secure funding. This includes Ethnic & Community Based Organizations, Preferred Communities, Elderly Programs, Home Childcare, Refugee Agricultural Partnership, Microenterprise, Individual Development Account, Cuban Haitian, Technical & Training Assistance, and School Impact grants.

#### **The Need to Act**

As a nation of immigrants, we know better than most the importance of providing hope and opportunity to those fleeing persecution, and we expect our government to continue to demonstrate leadership on this issue. As outlined above, our security screening process for refugees is incredibly thorough. Thus, we cannot let fear immobilize us and excuse inaction when refugees are in need of life-saving protection. I welcome any questions or opportunity to



meet to discuss the program and our recommendations further. Thank you for your time and consideration.