

# Syrian Refugee Admissions to the United States

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## Related Policy Issue

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## Recent Developments

With some European countries pledging to accept increased numbers of Syrian and other asylum seekers in the face of a [refugee crisis](#), attention is focused on the United States and its plans to admit Syrian and other refugees in FY2016 and beyond. The Obama Administration initially proposed an overall refugee ceiling of 75,000 for FY2016 and held consultations with Congress on that proposal, as required by law. On September 20, 2015, however, Secretary of State John Kerry announced that the [refugee ceiling for FY2016 would instead be 85,000](#). Previously the Administration had announced that the United States [would admit at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in FY2016](#). Once final, the refugee ceiling and regional allocations (for Africa, East Asia, Europe/Central Asia, Latin America/Caribbean, and Near East/South Asia) for the next fiscal year are set forth in an annual Presidential Determination on refugee admissions.

The FY2015 worldwide refugee ceiling is 70,000 and the allocation for the Near East/South Asia region, which includes Syria, is 31,000. The [FY2015 refugee admissions proposal](#) included a discussion of U.S. plans to resettle Syrian refugees. From October 1, 2010, through August 31, 2015, the United States has admitted a total of 1,494 Syrian refugees, [almost 1,300 of that total since October 1, 2014](#).

## Definition of a Refugee

The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) defines a *refugee* as a person who is outside his or her country and is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. In special circumstances, a refugee also may be a person who is within his or her country and is persecuted or has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

## Refugee Admissions Process

Refugees are admitted to the United States from abroad. In most cases, refugee applicants are processed outside their home countries; [in-country processing](#) is available only in limited circumstances. The Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) is responsible for managing the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Most prospective refugees are referred to the U.S. program by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for adjudicating refugee cases, which are handled by officers in the agency's Refugee Corps.

In order to be admitted to the United States in refugee status, a prospective refugee, in addition to meeting the INA definition of a refugee, cannot be firmly resettled in any foreign country, must be determined to be of special humanitarian concern to the United States, and must be admissible to the United States under the applicable grounds of inadmissibility in the INA. Refugees are subject to the INA criminal and security-related grounds of inadmissibility, among other grounds, and undergo applicable biographic and biometric security checks. Refugee applicants must clear all required checks before their applications can receive final approval.

Approved refugees are admitted to the United States in refugee status. They are not issued visas. After one year in refugee status in the United States, refugees are required to apply to adjust to lawful permanent resident (LPR) status.

#### Resettlement in the United States

Arriving refugees are placed in communities in the United States through the [DOS Reception and Placement program](#), which provides refugees with initial resettlement services. [FY2015 arrivals have been placed in 48 states and the District of Columbia](#). Longer-term transitional assistance is provided through a program administered by the Department of Health and Human Services' [Office of Refugee Resettlement](#) (ORR), within the Administration for Children and Families.