

**PROPOSED REFUGEE ADMISSIONS
FOR
FISCAL YEAR 2017**

REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
TO THE
COMMITTEES ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES SENATE
AND
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF
SECTIONS 207(d)(1) and (e)
OF THE
IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY ACT

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**



INTRODUCTION

This *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017: Report to the Congress* is submitted in compliance with Sections 207(d)(1) and (e) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). The Act requires that before the start of the fiscal year and, to the extent possible, at least two weeks prior to consultations on refugee admissions, members of the Committees on the Judiciary of the Senate and the House of Representatives be provided with the following information:

- (1) A description of the nature of the refugee situation;
- (2) A description of the number and allocation of the refugees to be admitted and an analysis of conditions within the countries from which they came;
- (3) A description of the plans for their movement and resettlement and the estimated cost of their movement and resettlement;
- (4) An analysis of the anticipated social, economic, and demographic impact of their admission to the United States;¹
- (5) A description of the extent to which other countries will admit and assist in the resettlement of such refugees;
- (6) An analysis of the impact of the participation of the United States in the resettlement of such refugees on the foreign policy interests of the United States; and
- (7) Such additional information as may be appropriate or requested by such members.

This report contains information as required by Section 602(d) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-292, October 27, 1998, 112 Stat. 2787) (IRFA) about religious persecution of refugee populations eligible for consideration for admission to the United States. This report meets the reporting requirements of Section 305(b) of the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-333, October 18, 2004, 118 Stat. 1287) by providing information about specific measures taken to facilitate access to the United States refugee program for individuals who have fled “countries of particular concern” for violations of religious freedoms, identified pursuant to Section 402(b) of the IRFA.

¹ Detailed discussion of the anticipated social and economic impact, including secondary migration, of the admission of refugees to the United States is being provided in the *Report to the Congress* of the Refugee Resettlement Program, Office of Refugee Resettlement, Department of Health and Human Services.

FOREWORD

On the occasion of World Refugee Day, June 20, President Obama reaffirmed our nation's commitment to helping refugees and our leading role in providing safe haven. This commitment comes in the midst of an unprecedented global migration and refugee crisis. There is currently a higher number of refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced persons – more than 65 million – than at any time on record. The United States leads the world in providing humanitarian aid to crises overseas and also accepts more refugees for resettlement through the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) than any other country.

While starting life anew in the United States may be daunting, it also offers hope and unparalleled opportunity. It is a chance not only to escape from violence and persecution but to make a fresh start. The assistance the American people provide helps newcomers find their footing and become a part of their new communities. Refugees are not the only ones who benefit; they add to America's vitality and diversity and make substantial contributions to our economic and cultural life.

Resettlement in a third country is a solution for some of the world's most vulnerable refugees. As a matter of principle, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) offers the possibility of resettlement to refugees regardless of their location, national origin, health status, occupational skills, or level of educational attainment.

U.S. Resettlement Program Growing

In FY 2016, the Administration aims to reach the ceiling of 85,000 refugee arrivals established by the President, and in FY 2017 will strive to admit 110,000 refugees. This represents a 57 percent increase over a two-year period from the 70,000 refugees admitted to the United States in 2015. In the current fiscal year, more refugees are likely to be resettled to the United States from the Near East/South Asia region than in any year on record, as well as more refugees from Africa than in any of the past dozen years. In order to achieve this, the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) expanded operations in Jordan, Tanzania, and Uganda, interviewing nearly 25,000 refugee applicants. By co-locating and surging staff, the USRAP significantly reduced the time between certain steps in the process, including UNHCR referral, pre-screening, DHS interview, and medical screening, and thus decreased overall processing time without curtailing the program's robust security checks.

Increasing the refugee admissions ceiling to 110,000 in FY 2017 will require cooperation among several U.S. government agencies, including close interagency coordination on security checks and other requirements. As a public-private partnership, the program also depends on the support of American non-governmental organizations, charities, faith-based groups and thousands of volunteers and caring people in hundreds of communities across the country.

Leaders' Summit on Refugees

On September 20, 2016, President Obama will host the Leaders' Summit on Refugees at the United Nations for countries that have made new and significant commitments to increase international humanitarian assistance; to create greater opportunities for legal resettlement or other legal pathways for admission to safe countries; and to enact policies that allow refugees to be self-reliant, including by increasing the number of refugees worldwide in school by one million, and the number of refugees granted the legal right to work by one million.

President Obama also launched a private sector Call to Action in advance of this year's UN General Assembly to draw on the expertise, resources and entrepreneurial spirit of the private sector to help refugees. The Call to Action asks companies to make "new, measurable and significant commitments that will have a durable impact on refugees residing in countries on the frontlines of the global refugee crisis and in countries of resettlement, like the United States." The Call to Action is focused on generating corporate commitments

"Today, on World Refugee Day, we recognize the challenges and hardships that refugees face, honor their courage and resilience in the face of overwhelming obstacles, and celebrate their many valuable contributions to our Nation.

This year's commemoration comes as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reports that more people are displaced by rising violence, insecurity, and persecution than at any time on record. More than 65 million people around the world – more than the population of France, or California and Texas combined – have been driven from their homes. More than half are children. The scale of this human suffering is almost unimaginable; the need for the world to respond is beyond question.

Every day, members of the international community, humanitarian organizations, civil society, and individual citizens work to assist these vulnerable populations. For our part, the United States provides more humanitarian assistance to refugees than any other nation and maintains the world's largest refugee resettlement program. We support programs that provide food, water, shelter, and medical care to refugees, and fight for their rights to safety, dignity and long-term livelihood opportunities.

Today, we commemorate the spirit and strength of refugees worldwide and the dedication of those who help them on and after their journeys. Protecting and assisting refugees is a part of our history as a Nation, and we will continue to alleviate the suffering of refugees abroad, and to welcome them here at home, because doing so reflects our American values and our noblest traditions as a Nation, enriches our society, and strengthens our collective security."

President Barack Obama
June 20, 2016
In commemoration of World Refugee Day

in three key areas: facilitating access to education; increasing employment opportunities for refugees; and helping refugees to get the resources they need to become self-reliant. Commitments can be directed towards refugees resettled in the United States or located anywhere in the world.

Syrian Resettlement on the Rise

The refugee crisis caused by the conflict in Syria is the worst the world has witnessed in a generation, generating more than 5 million refugees in the region. The U.S. government is deeply committed to assisting the Syrian people and has provided nearly \$5.6 billion in humanitarian assistance since the start of the crisis, more than any other donor. While the vast majority of Syrians would prefer to return home when the conflict ends, it is clear that some remain extremely vulnerable in their countries of asylum and would benefit from resettlement. The United States will meet or exceed the goal of admitting 10,000 Syrian refugees in FY 2016 and aims to admit a significantly higher number in FY 2017.

The United States is one of 32 countries that have agreed to accept referrals from UNHCR as part of its ambitious international effort to secure permanent or temporary resettlement for up to 10 percent of Syrian refugees. As of mid-2016, UNHCR has secured commitments from these countries to admit more than 220,000 Syrians for permanent resettlement, humanitarian admission, private sponsorship, or academic scholarships.

“Today, we honor refugees’ resilience and courage. We also recognize the tremendous contributions made by local and international non-governmental organizations on the front lines of delivering life-saving assistance. This year’s commemoration comes at a time when brutal conflicts are forcing record numbers of innocent people to flee, and challenging the world to find better ways to protect them. The war in Syria alone has displaced more than 11 million people – half of that nation’s pre-war population. Millions more have fled Daesh’s atrocities in Iraq, civil wars in Yemen and South Sudan, political violence in Burundi, and Boko Haram’s rampages through Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad.

The number of forcibly displaced people is the largest ever recorded. Sixty-five million people are refugees, internally displaced or seeking asylum, five million more than a year ago.

The refugees we welcome to the United States will join previous generations who have come to this country to escape violence and persecution – threats to human life and dignity that remain all too real today. History celebrates such moments when we have overcome bias and fear, and opened our doors. Those who have walked through them have made immeasurable contributions to our community of citizens and enriched our lives. Their achievements are a testament to the potential all humans have to heal, to overcome loss, to start over, and to the obligation we share, to give future generations that chance.”

Secretary John Kerry
June 20, 2016

In commemoration of World Refugee Day

Protecting Vulnerable Children and Others in Central America

In December 2014, the Administration established an in-country refugee and parole program for children in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Under the initial program, lawfully present parents in the United States could file to bring their unmarried children under age 21 to join them in this country, and in certain circumstances, an in-country parent could be approved to travel with the approved child to the United States. In July 2016, the Administration announced an expansion of the program to include the following relatives, when accompanied by a child under age 21: sons and daughters age 21 and older and/or married, the biological parent of the child even if not married to the U.S.-based lawfully present parent, and certain caregivers who are also related to the U.S.-based lawfully present parent. As of August 2016, parents have submitted more than 9,500 applications and more than 700 children have arrived to join parents in the United States. Thousands more will be joining parents in the coming months as an increasing number of interviews have been conducted and applications are being approved.

In July 2016, the Government of Costa Rica announced that it had entered into a protection transfer arrangement (PTA) with UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration to provide protection to vulnerable individuals and families from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Under the PTA, Costa Rica will serve as a temporary site to host Central Americans awaiting completion of their refugee application process and onward resettlement to the United States or another third country. For cases not requiring immediate transfer to Costa Rica, we have also moved to establish an in-country referral program for residents of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Under this program, UNHCR will assist in identifying vulnerable individuals who will be considered for refugee protection in the United States after being screened and interviewed by the U.S. Government in their countries of origin.

Ensuring National Security in the Refugee Admissions Program and Combatting Fraud

The USRAP continues to employ rigorous security measures to protect against threats to our national security and is committed to deterring and detecting fraud among those seeking to resettle in the United States.

Refugees of every nationality are subject to the highest level of security checks for any category of traveler to the United States. This multi-step screening process includes intensive biographic and biometric screening involving multiple federal intelligence, security, and law enforcement agencies including the National Counterterrorism Center, the Federal Bureau of

Investigation, and the Departments of State, Defense, and Homeland Security. A step-by-step guide to the process is posted at the following link:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/11/20/infographic-screening-process-refugee-entry-united-states>.

The USRAP continues to work on an interagency basis not only to maintain the highest rigor in screening refugee applicants, but also continually to seek ways to strengthen existing procedures.

Sharing Best Practices on Resettlement and Integration

Beginning in mid-2015, interest in refugee resettlement in the United States, Canada, and Europe has surged. National and local resettlement agencies in the United States have reported receiving a remarkable number of offers of assistance including donations of household and personal goods, housing, and willingness to ‘sponsor’ or befriend refugees. At the same time, some elected officials have publicly stated their opposition to resettling certain refugees in their states. These dynamics have sparked a debate about admitting refugees to this country and increased interest in learning more about the program in communities large and small throughout the country.

The White House Task Force on New Americans was established by President Obama in November 2014 to strengthen integration efforts nationwide and build welcoming communities for all immigrants, including refugees. As stated in the preamble to the one-year progress report, this interagency effort was launched “to develop a coordinated federal strategy to better integrate new Americans into communities and support state and local efforts to do the same.” Sixteen core goals and 48 recommendations were made to enhance the civic, linguistic, and economic integration of new Americans. Various campaigns, initiatives, pilots, partnerships, websites, and best practices were launched and shared by federal agencies, state and local governments, White House offices, businesses, educators, community and faith-based organizations, and philanthropists.

Numerous foreign government and civic leaders approached the United States this year to learn about the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and to seek information about establishing or improving refugee resettlement programs in their countries. The Department of State has been deeply involved in helping to design programs for groups visiting the United States who are interested in refugee resettlement and integration, and in showcasing the best examples of successful local and national programs. These groups have met with federal officials, toured national resettlement agency headquarters, and visited dozens of local communities throughout the country to meet representatives from the public

and private agencies and organizations that welcome refugees and other immigrants every day.

Conclusion

America's reputation as a nation of refuge provides a beacon of hope for persecuted people around the world and serves as a model for new resettlement nations. Through the USRAP, our government, cooperating private partners, and American citizens in communities throughout the country demonstrate day in and day out the generosity and core values of our nation.

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I. OVERVIEW OF U.S. REFUGEE POLICY

At the end of 2015, the estimated refugee population worldwide stood at 21.3 million, with 16.1 million under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This represents an increase of 1.7 million refugees under UNHCR mandate in one year. The United States actively supports efforts to provide protection, assistance, and durable solutions to these refugees, as these measures fulfill our humanitarian interests and further our foreign policy and national security interests. Under the authority of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962, as amended, the United States contributes to the programs of UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and other international and non-governmental organizations that provide protection and assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), victims of conflict, stateless persons, and other vulnerable migrants. These contributions are used to address the legal and physical protection needs of refugees and to furnish basic assistance such as water, sanitation, food, health care, shelter, education, and other services. The United States monitors these programs to ensure the most effective use of resources, maximizing humanitarian impact for the beneficiaries.

The United States and UNHCR recognize that most refugees desire safe, voluntary return to their homeland. In 2015, some 201,400 refugees voluntarily repatriated to their country of origin – a nearly 60% increase over 2014, but unfortunately, still low. Refugee repatriation operations brought refugees home to Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, and Central African Republic, among others. These operations were carried out to protect returning refugees as well as to help them contribute to the stabilization, reconstruction, and development of their home countries.

Where opportunities for refugees' safe and voluntary return remain elusive, the United States and its partners pursue self-sufficiency and temporary, indefinite, or permanent local integration in countries of asylum. The Department of State encourages host governments to protect refugees and to allow them to integrate into local communities. The State Department further promotes local integration by funding programs to enhance refugee self-reliance and support community-based social services. Groups that have availed themselves of opportunities for local integration in recent years include Afghans in India, Angolans in Zambia, Burundians in Tanzania, Liberians and Sierra Leoneans in seven countries across West Africa, and Colombians in Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama and Venezuela. Mali agreed to provide birth certificates to some 8,000 Mauritanian refugee children, paving the way for them to eventually apply for Malian citizenship.

UNHCR estimates that there are at least 10 million people worldwide who are not recognized as nationals of any state and are therefore stateless. Without citizenship in any country, many stateless persons are unable to move freely, to access basic services such as health care and schools, to work legally, to own property, or to access police protection and systems of justice. The United States supports UNHCR's mandate to prevent and reduce statelessness, including its Global Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024. The United States is encouraging States to address gaps in citizenship laws that result in statelessness, to eliminate provisions that discriminate against women, to facilitate naturalization for stateless persons, and to ensure universal birth registration. U.S. contributions to UNHCR's core budget support efforts to prevent and address statelessness in Burma, the Dominican Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Nepal, Sudan, Syria, and elsewhere. In addition, the Department of State seeks to use the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) to demonstrate leadership and encourage other countries to do more to help stateless people and refugees in protracted situations. This approach is reflected in, for example, the current resettlement of protracted Rohingya refugees from Burma who were born outside Burma, mostly in Malaysia and Thailand.

The United States, like UNHCR, recognizes that resettlement in third countries is a vital tool for providing certain refugees protection and/or a durable solution. For some refugees, resettlement is the best, and perhaps the only, alternative. In particular, stateless refugees who arrive in the United States for resettlement not only find a durable solution to their displacement, but are also placed on a path that will afford the opportunity to naturalize and resolve their stateless status.

For more than a decade, the U.S. government has provided financial support to expand and improve UNHCR's resettlement capacity, principally by funding staff and construction of facilities. As a result, UNHCR has substantially increased referrals to the United States and other resettlement countries, submitting more than 134,000 individuals for resettlement in 2015 – an increase of nearly 30% over 2014. We plan to continue to work with UNHCR and consult with host governments on group referrals. We will continue to assess resettlement needs and allow qualified NGOs to refer refugee applicants to the program.

The United States has also supported UNHCR's efforts to expand the number of countries active in resettlement. In 2015, UNHCR referred refugees to 27 countries for resettlement consideration. Over 90 percent of refugees referred for resettlement were referred to the United States, Australia, and Canada. Smaller numbers of referrals were made to Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Czech Republic,

Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay, and the United Kingdom.

While the overall number of refugees referred by UNHCR and the percentages resettled by various countries fluctuate from year to year, the United States aims to ensure that at least 50 percent of all refugees referred by UNHCR worldwide are considered for resettlement in the United States, depending on the availability of funds. Some 64 percent of UNHCR-referred refugees who were resettled in 2015, were resettled in the United States (see Table VIII).

The foreign policy and humanitarian interests of the United States are often advanced by addressing refugee issues in asylum and resettlement countries. In some cases, the United States has been able to use its leadership position in resettlement to promote and secure other durable solutions for refugees, or advance other human rights or foreign policy objectives. The United States is by far the largest single donor to UNHCR, providing over \$1.33 billion in FY 2015. During the past few years, U.S. resettlement efforts in Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia have helped energize efforts by UNHCR and other countries to ensure that first asylum is maintained for larger refugee populations and that local integration or third country resettlement are options offered to those in need. In certain locations, the prompt resettlement of politically sensitive cases has helped defuse regional tensions.

During its history, the USRAP has responded to changing circumstances. The end of the Cold War dramatically altered the context in which the USRAP operated. The program shifted its focus away from large groups concentrated in a few locations (primarily refugees from Vietnam, the former Soviet Union, and the former Yugoslavia) and began to admit refugees representing over 50 nationalities per year. Today, officials from the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (DHS/USCIS) often conduct refugee applicant interviews in remote locations and focus on the individuals and populations who most need third country resettlement opportunities.

While maintaining the United States' leadership role in humanitarian protection, an integral part of this mission is to ensure that refugee resettlement opportunities go only to those who are eligible for such protection and who do not present a risk to the safety and security of our country. Accordingly, the USRAP is committed to deterring and detecting fraud among those seeking to resettle in the United States and continues to employ rigorous security measures to protect against threats to our national security.

Refugees resettled in the United States enrich our nation. The USRAP is premised on the idea that refugees should become economically self-sufficient as quickly as possible. The Department of State works domestically with agencies participating in the Reception and Placement (R&P) program to ensure that refugees receive services in the first 30 to 90 days after arrival in accordance with established standards. During and after the initial resettlement period, the Office of Refugee Resettlement at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS/ORR) provides technical assistance and funding to states, the District of Columbia, and nonprofit organizations to help refugees become self-sufficient and integrated into U.S. society. ORR programs use formula and discretionary grants to provide cash and medical assistance, employment and training programs, and other services to newly arriving and recently arrived refugees. Refugees arriving in the United States are expected to be future U.S. citizens. Refugees are immediately authorized to work upon resettlement in the United States, and after one year in this country are required to apply for lawful permanent resident status. Five years after admission, a refugee who has been granted lawful permanent resident status is eligible to apply for citizenship.

REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM FOR FY 2017

PROPOSED CEILINGS

TABLE I

**REFUGEE ADMISSIONS IN FY 2015 AND FY 2016
PROPOSED REFUGEE ADMISSIONS BY REGION FOR FY 2017²**

REGION	FY 2015 ACTUAL ARRIVALS	FY 2016 CEILING	FY 2016 PROJECTED ARRIVALS	PROPOSED FY2017 CEILING
Africa	22,472	25,000	27,500	35,000
East Asia	18,469	13,000	14,000	12,000
Europe and Central Asia	2,363	4,000	4,000	4,000
Latin America/Caribbean	2,050	3,000	1,500	5,000
Near East/South Asia	24,579	34,000	38,000	40,000
Regional Subtotal	69,933	79,000	85,000	96,000
Unallocated Reserve		6,000		14,000
Total	69,933	85,000	85,000	110,000

Generally, to be considered a refugee, a person must be outside his or her country of nationality or, if stateless, outside his or her country of last habitual residence. Additionally, under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) § 101(a)(42)(B), the President may specify circumstances under which individuals who are within their countries of nationality or last habitual residence may be considered a refugee for purposes of admission to the United States. The FY 2017 refugee admissions proposal recommends continuing such in-country processing for specified persons in Iraq, Cuba, Eurasia and the Baltics, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. Persons for whom resettlement is requested by a U.S. ambassador in any location in the world may also be considered, with the understanding that those within their countries of nationality or last habitual residence will only be referred to the USRAP following Department of State consultation with USCIS at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Likewise, the U.S. will consider

² These proposed figures assume enactment by Congress of the President's Budget levels related to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program elements.

accepting a limited number of referrals from qualified NGOs of highly vulnerable individuals within their countries of nationality or last habitual residence following Department of State consultation with USCIS.

Unallocated Reserve

This proposal includes 14,000 unallocated admissions numbers to be used if needed for additional refugee admissions from any region. The unallocated numbers would only be used following notification to Congress.

ADMISSIONS PROCEDURES

Eligibility Criteria

The Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) is responsible for coordinating and managing the USRAP. A critical part of this responsibility is determining which individuals or groups from among the millions of refugees worldwide will have access to U.S. resettlement consideration. PRM coordinates within the Department of State, as well as with DHS/USCIS and other agencies, in carrying out this responsibility.

Section 207(a)(3) of the INA states that the USRAP shall allocate admissions among refugees "of special humanitarian concern to the United States in accordance with a determination made by the President after appropriate consultation." Which individuals are "of special humanitarian concern" to the United States for the purpose of refugee resettlement consideration is determined through the USRAP priority system. There are currently three priorities or categories of cases:

- Priority 1 – Individual cases referred to the program by virtue of their circumstances and apparent need for resettlement;
- Priority 2 – Groups of cases designated as having access to the program by virtue of their circumstances and apparent need for resettlement; and
- Priority 3 – Individual cases from designated nationalities granted access for purposes of reunification with family members already in the United States.

(Note: Refugees resettled in the United States may also seek the admission of spouses and unmarried children under 21 who are still abroad by filing a "Following to Join" petition, which obviates the need for a separate refugee claim adjudication. This option is described in more detail in the discussion of Following to Join cases below.)

Access to the USRAP under one of the above-listed processing priorities does not necessarily mean an applicant meets the statutory definition of a “refugee” or is admissible to the United States under the INA. Applicants who are eligible for access to the USRAP within the established priorities are presented to DHS/USCIS officers for interview. The ultimate determination as to whether an applicant can be admitted as a refugee is made by DHS/USCIS in accordance with criteria set forth in the INA and various security protocols.

Although the access categories to the USRAP are referred to as “processing priorities,” it is important to note that entering the program under a certain priority does not establish precedence in the order in which cases will be processed. Once cases are established as eligible for access under one of the three processing priorities, they all undergo the same processing steps.

PRIORITY 1 – INDIVIDUAL REFERRALS

Priority 1 (P-1) allows consideration of refugee claims from persons of any nationality,³ usually with compelling protection needs, for whom resettlement appears to be the appropriate durable solution. Priority 1 cases are identified and referred to the program by UNHCR, a U.S. Embassy, or a designated NGO. UNHCR, which has the international mandate worldwide to provide protection to refugees worldwide, has historically referred the vast majority of cases to the United States under this priority. Some NGOs providing humanitarian assistance in locations where there are large concentrations of refugees have also undergone training by PRM and DHS/USCIS and have been designated as eligible to provide Priority 1 referrals.

Process for Priority 1 Individual Referral Applications

Priority 1 (P-1) referrals from UNHCR and NGOs are submitted to the appropriate Regional Refugee Coordinator, who forwards the referrals to the appropriate Resettlement Support Center (RSC) for case processing and scheduling of the DHS/USCIS interview. PRM’s Office of Admissions reviews embassy referrals for completeness and may consult with DHS/USCIS in considering these referrals.

A U.S. ambassador may make a Priority 1 referral for persons still in their country of origin if the ambassador determines that such cases are in need of exceptional treatment and the Departments of State (PRM) and Homeland Security

³ Referrals of North Koreans and Palestinians require State Department and DHS/USCIS concurrence before they may be granted access to the USRAP.

(DHS/USCIS) concur. When a Priority 1 referral cannot be made, in some limited cases, a Department of State request to DHS/USCIS for parole may be an appropriate option.

PRIORITY 2 – GROUP REFERRALS

Priority 2 (P-2) includes specific groups (within certain nationalities, clans, or ethnic groups; sometimes in specified locations) identified by the Department of State in consultation with DHS/USCIS, NGOs, UNHCR, and other experts whose members are in need of resettlement. Some Priority 2 groups are processed in their country of origin. The process of identifying the group and its characteristics includes consideration of whether the group is of special humanitarian concern to the United States and whether individual members of the group will likely be able to qualify for admission as refugees under U.S. law. Groups may be designated as Priority 2 during the course of the year as circumstances dictate, and the need for resettlement arises. PRM plays the coordinating role for all group referrals to the USRAP.

There are two distinct models of Priority 2 access to the program: open access and predefined group access, often upon the recommendation of UNHCR. Under both models, Priority 2 designations are made based on shared characteristics that define the group. In general, these characteristics are the reason members of the group have been persecuted in the past or face persecution in the future.

The open-access model for Priority 2 group referrals allows individuals to seek access to the program on the basis of meeting designated criteria. To establish an open-access Priority 2 group, PRM, in consultation with DHS/USCIS, and (as appropriate) with UNHCR and others, defines the specific criteria for access. Once the designation is in place, applicants may approach the program at any of the processing locations specified as available for the group to begin the application process. Applicants must demonstrate that they meet the specified criteria to establish eligibility for access to the USRAP.

The open-access model has functioned well in the in-country programs, including the long-standing programs in Eurasia and the Baltics, and in Cuba. It was also used successfully for Vietnamese for nearly thirty years (1980-2009), and Bosnian refugees during the 1990s. It is now in use for Iranians belonging religious minorities, Iraqis with links to the United States, and individuals from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras with lawfully present parents in the United States.

The RSCs responsible for handling open-access Priority 2 applications, working under the direction of PRM, make a preliminary determination as to whether individual applicants qualify for access and should be presented to DHS/USCIS for interview. Applicants who clearly do not meet the access requirements are “screened out” prior to the DHS/USCIS interview.

In contrast to an open-access group, a predefined group designation is normally based on a UNHCR recommendation that lays out eligibility criteria that should apply to individuals in a specific location. Once PRM, in consultation with DHS/USCIS, has established the access eligibility criteria for the group, the referring entity (usually UNHCR) provides the biographical data of eligible refugee applicants for processing. This type of group referral is advantageous in situations in which the intensive labor required to generate individual UNHCR referrals would be impracticable, potentially harmful to applicants due to delays, or counterproductive. Often, predefined groups are composed of persons with similar persecution claims. The predefined group referral process saves the labor intensive individual referral step and can conserve scarce UNHCR resources. In recent years, predefined groups have included certain Burmese in Thailand, certain Bhutanese in Nepal, and certain Congolese in Tanzania and Rwanda. Predefined group referrals with clear, well-defined eligibility criteria and several methods for cross-checking group membership can serve as a fraud deterrent as well, preventing non-group members from gaining access to the USRAP by falsely claiming group membership. Once an individual gains access to processing via a P-2 designation, all other processing steps are the same as for those referred by P-1, including individual pre-screening and USCIS interviews, and all security and medical checks.

FY 2017 Priority 2 Designations

In-country processing programs

The following ongoing programs that process individuals still in their country of origin under Priority 2 group designations will continue in FY 2017, all of which are “open-access” type P-2s:

Eurasia and the Baltics

This Priority 2 designation applies to Jews, Evangelical Christians, and Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox religious adherents identified in the Lautenberg Amendment, Public Law No. 101-167, § 599D, 103 Stat. 1261 (1989) (codified at 8 U.S.C. § 1157) as amended (“Lautenberg Amendment”), with close family in the

United States. With annual renewal of the Lautenberg Amendment, these individuals are considered under a reduced evidentiary standard for establishing a well-founded fear of persecution.

Cuba

Included in this Priority 2 program are human rights activists, members of persecuted religious minorities, former political prisoners, forced-labor conscripts, and persons deprived of their professional credentials or subjected to other disproportionately harsh or discriminatory treatment resulting from their perceived or actual political or religious beliefs.

Iraqis Associated with the United States

Under various Priority 2 designations, including those set forth in the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act, employees of the U.S. Government, a U.S. government-funded contractor or grantee, U.S. media or U.S. NGOs working in Iraq, and certain family members of such employees, as well as beneficiaries of approved I-130 (immigrant visa) petitions, are eligible for refugee processing in Iraq.

Persons in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras

Under this Priority 2 program that was expanded in July 2016, certain lawfully present parents in the United States can request access to a refugee interview for sons and daughters still in the country of origin, as well as the biological parent of an unmarried child under 21, and caregivers.

Groups of Humanitarian Concern outside the Country of Origin

The following Priority 2 groups are already designated and, in most cases, undergoing processing with significant arrivals anticipated during FY 2016. (Additional Priority 2 groups may be designated over the course of FY 2017.)

Pre-defined Group Access P-2s:

Ethnic Minorities and others from Burma in camps in Thailand

Under this existing Priority 2 designation, individuals who have fled Burma, are registered in one of nine refugee camps along the Thai/Burma border, are identified by UNHCR as in need of resettlement, and expressed interest prior to January 2014 (depending on the location), are eligible for processing.

Ethnic Minorities from Burma in Malaysia

Under this Priority 2 designation, members of ethnic minorities from Burma who are recognized by UNHCR as refugees in Malaysia and identified as being in need of resettlement are eligible for processing.

Bhutanese in Nepal

Under this existing Priority 2 designation, Bhutanese refugees registered by UNHCR in camps in Nepal, identified as in need of resettlement, and expressed interest prior to June 30, 2014, are eligible for processing.

Congolese in Rwanda

Under this new Priority 2 designation, certain Congolese refugees in Rwanda who arrived between 1994 and 2005 were verifiably registered in 2011 or 2012 and identified as in need of resettlement are eligible for processing.

Congolese in Tanzania

Under this Priority 2 designation signed in May 2015, certain Congolese refugees registered by UNHCR in Tanzania whose residence in Nyaragusu camp was confirmed in a 2013-2014 UNHCR verification exercise are eligible for processing.

Open Access Model P-2s:

Iranian Religious Minorities

Under this Priority 2 designation, Iranian members of certain religious minorities are eligible for processing and are considered under a reduced evidentiary standard for establishing a well-founded fear of persecution, pursuant to annual renewal of the Lautenberg Amendment as amended in 2004 by Sec. 213 of Title II, Division E, of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2004, P.L. 108-199, 118 Stat. 3 (“the Specter Amendment”).

Iraqis Associated with the United States

Under various Priority 2 designations, including those set forth in the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act, employees of the U.S. government, a U.S. government-funded contractor or grantee, U.S. media or U.S. NGOs working in Iraq, and certain family members of such employees, as well as beneficiaries of approved I-130 (immigrant visa) petitions, are eligible for refugee processing. This program is operating in Jordan and Egypt, in addition to the in-country program in Iraq.

Syrian Beneficiaries of Approved I-130 petitions

Under this new Priority 2 designation, Syrian beneficiaries of approved I-130 immigrant visa petitions, for whom immigrant visas have not yet been issued, are

eligible for refugee processing. For U.S. citizens, eligible relationships to the U.S. based petitioner include spouse, children (regardless of age or marital status), siblings and parents. For lawful permanent residents, eligible relationships to the petitioner include spouse and unmarried children (regardless of age).

PRIORITY 3 – FAMILY REUNIFICATION

The Priority 3 (P-3) category affords USRAP access to members of designated nationalities who have immediate family members in the United States who initially entered as refugees or were granted asylum. At the beginning of each fiscal year, PRM, in consultation with DHS/USCIS, establishes the list of nationalities eligible for processing under this priority. The PRM Assistant Secretary may modify the list during the year, in consultation with DHS/USCIS, but additions or deletions are generally made to coincide with the fiscal year.

Inclusion on the P-3 list represents a finding by PRM that the nationality is of special humanitarian concern to the United States for the purpose of family-reunification refugee processing. Eligible nationalities are selected following careful review of several factors. UNHCR's annual assessment of refugees in need of resettlement provides insight into ongoing refugee situations which could create the need for family-reunification processing. In addition, prospective or ongoing repatriation efforts and U.S. foreign policy interests must be weighed in determining which nationalities should be eligible.

The P-3 program has undergone significant changes in recent years. In order to qualify for access under the P-3 program, an applicant must be outside of his or her country of origin, be registered or have legal status in the country of asylum, have had an Affidavit of Relationship (AOR) filed on his or her behalf by an eligible family member in the United States during a period in which the nationality was included on the eligibility list, and have been cleared for onward processing by the DHS/USCIS Refugee Access Verification Unit (RAVU).

Family members who are eligible to file an AOR are persons who were admitted to the United States as refugees or were granted asylum, including persons who are lawful permanent residents of the United States or U.S. citizens who initially were admitted to the United States as refugees or were granted asylum. The U.S.-based filer must be at least 18 years of age at the time the AOR is filed and must file the AOR within 5 years of the date he or she entered the United States as a refugee or was granted asylum. The USRAP may reject any AOR for a relationship that does not comport with public policy, such as under-age or plural marriages.

The following family members of the U.S.-based family members are qualified for P-3 access: spouse, unmarried children under 21, and/or parents. A U.S.-based family member may apply for a same-sex spouse if a legal marriage was conducted and documented. Cognizant that same-sex marriage is not legal in the vast majority of refugee-producing and refugee-hosting countries, the United States will allow a qualifying individual to file for P-3 access for a same-sex partner if he or she can provide evidence that he/she had a relationship with the partner for at least one year overseas prior to the submission of the AOR and considered that person to be his/her spouse or life partner, and that the relationship is ongoing, together with evidence that legal marriage was not an obtainable option due to social and/or legal prohibitions.

Under certain circumstances, a U.S.-based individual may file for P-3 access for an opposite-sex partner if he or she can provide evidence that he/she had a relationship with the partner for at least one year overseas prior to the submission of the AOR and considered that person to be his/her spouse or life partner, and that the relationship is ongoing, together with evidence that legal marriage was not an obtainable option due to social and/or legal prohibitions.

In addition to the qualifying family members of a U.S.-based individual identified above, the qualifying family member's spouse and unmarried children under 21 may derive refugee status from the principal applicant for refugee status.

On a case-by-case basis, an individual may be added to a qualifying family member's P-3 case if that individual:

- 1) lived in the same household as the qualifying family member in the country of nationality or, if stateless, last habitual residence; AND
- 2) was part of the same economic unit as the qualifying family member in the country of nationality or, if stateless, last habitual residence; AND
- 3) demonstrates exceptional and compelling humanitarian circumstances that justify inclusion on the qualifying family member's case.

These individuals are not "spouses" or "children", under INA 207(c)(2)(A) and thus cannot derive their refugee status from the Principal Applicant. They must, therefore, independently establish that they qualify as a refugee.

FY 2017 Priority 3 Nationalities

P-3 processing is available to individuals of the following nationalities:

Afghanistan
Bhutan
Burundi
Central African Republic
Colombia
Cuba
Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
El Salvador
Eritrea
Ethiopia
Guatemala
Haiti
Honduras
Iran
Iraq
Mali
Somalia
South Sudan
Sudan
Syria
Uzbekistan

FOLLOWING-TO-JOIN FAMILY REUNIFICATION PETITIONS

Under 8 CFR Section 207.7, a principal refugee admitted to the United States may request following-to-join benefits for his or her spouse and/or unmarried children under the age of 21 who were not previously granted refugee status. Once in the United States, and within two years of admission, the refugee may file a Form I-730 Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition⁴ with DHS/USCIS for each eligible family member. If the Form I-730 petition is approved by DHS/USCIS' Service Center Operations Directorate, preliminarily or finally, (signifying adequate proof of eligibility based on a file review), the State

⁴ This petition is used to file for the relatives of both refugees and asylees, also known as Visa 93 and Visa 92 cases respectively. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program handles only Visa 93 cases, which are counted within the annual refugee admissions ceiling. Visa 92 cases are not considered to be refugee admissions cases and are not counted in the number of refugees admitted annually.

Department's National Visa Center then forwards the petition to the USCIS office,⁵ embassy, or consulate nearest to the location of the beneficiary for travel eligibility determination.

Individuals who gain access to the USRAP through an approved I-730 petition are interviewed by DHS/USCIS or consular officers to verify the relationships claimed in the petition, as well as to examine any applicable bars to status and admissibility to the United States. Beneficiaries are not required to establish past persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution, as they derive their status from the refugee relative in the United States who filed the petition. Beneficiaries of I-730 petitions may be processed within their country of origin or in other locations

Certain relatives in the United States may file an I-730 Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition and seek Priority 3 access for their qualifying family members (if eligible) simultaneously. In some cases, the I-730 petition will be the only option as the family members are still in their country of origin. It is also important to note that unlike the P-3 process, the I-730 or "follow-to-join" process does not allow the relative in the United States to petition for parents.

DHS/USCIS REFUGEE ADJUDICATIONS

Section 207(c) of the INA grants the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security authority to admit, at his or her discretion, any refugee who is not firmly resettled in a third country, who is determined to be of special humanitarian concern, and who is admissible to the United States. The authority to determine eligibility for refugee status has been delegated to USCIS. In 2005, DHS/USCIS restructured the Refugee Affairs Division and established the Refugee Corps, a specially trained cadre of officers dedicated to adjudicating applications for refugee status. The Refugee Corps provides DHS/USCIS with the necessary resources and flexibility to respond to an increasingly diversified refugee admissions program. In each quarter of FY 2016, on average, USCIS deployed approximately 100 Refugee Officers, Supervisory Refugee Officers, and fingerprinters, plus an additional 70 USCIS officers on temporary assignment, to 20-25 locations around the world to interview refugee applicants. DHS/USCIS also devotes substantial resources to security vetting, anti-fraud, and training

⁵Beginning in 2016, the final adjudication of I-730 petitions transferred to most USCIS international field offices are made by USICS international staff.

related to refugee processing, and it has strong partnerships with the law enforcement, national security, and intelligence communities to maintain and promote the integrity of the USRAP.

In order to support the increased refugee admissions ceilings in FY 2016 and FY 2017, the Refugee Affairs Division has been authorized to increase its staffing from 158 to 292 employees, which includes adjudicators, headquarters staff, and supervisors/managers.

The Eligibility Determination

In order to be approved for classification as a refugee, an applicant must meet the refugee definition contained in § 101(a)(42) of the INA. That section provides that a refugee is a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or last habitual residence and is unable or unwilling to return to that country 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. As mentioned above, the President may specify special circumstances under which a person can meet the refugee definition when he or she is still within his or her country of origin. The refugee definition excludes a person who has ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Further, an applicant who has been “firmly resettled” in a third country may not be admitted as a refugee under INA Section 207. Applicants are also subject to various statutory grounds of inadmissibility, including criminal, security, and public health grounds, some of which may be waived or from which applicants may be exempted.

The grounds of inadmissibility that apply to refugee applicants include the broad terrorism-related inadmissibility grounds (TRIG) at Section 212(a)(3)(B) of the INA. Beginning in 2005, the Departments of Homeland Security, State, and Justice began to exercise a discretionary Secretarial authority to exempt certain categories of refugee applicants from TRIG inadmissibility based on a determination that they did not represent a threat to the United States and otherwise merited an exemption for humanitarian purposes. In FY 2015, DHS/USCIS began implementing two new exemptions for individuals who provided insignificant or “certain limited” material support (including through routine commercial or social

transactions, in the course of providing humanitarian assistance, or under subduress pressure), to undesignated terrorist organizations. As of June 2016, more than 14,900 TRIG exemptions have been granted to refugee applicants.⁶

A DHS/USCIS officer conducts a non-adversarial, face-to-face interview of each refugee applicant designed to elicit information about the applicant's claim for refugee status and any grounds of ineligibility. The officer asks questions about the applicant's experiences in the country of origin, including problems and fears about returning (or remaining), as well as questions concerning the applicant's activities, background, and criminal history. The officer also considers evidence about conditions in the country of origin and assesses the applicant's credibility and claim.

Background Security Checks

Refugee applicants of all nationalities are required to undergo background security checks. Security checks include biographic name checks for all refugee applicants and biometric (fingerprint) checks for refugee applicants within certain age limits. PRM, through its overseas Resettlement Support Centers, initiates required biographic name checks, while USCIS is responsible for collecting biometric data for screening. Biographic and biometric information is vetted against a broad array of law enforcement, intelligence community, and other relevant databases to help confirm identity, to check for any criminal or other derogatory information (including watchlist information), and to identify information that could inform lines of questioning during the interview. Refugee applicants must clear all required security checks prior to final approval of their application.

PROCESSING ACTIVITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Overseas Processing Services

In most processing locations, PRM engages an NGO, an international organization (IO), or U.S. embassy contractors to manage a Resettlement Support Center (RSC) that assists in the processing of refugee applicants for admission to the United States. RSC staff pre-screen applicants to determine preliminarily if they qualify for one of the applicable processing priorities and to prepare cases for

⁶ Over 6,700 of these exemptions pertained to Burmese refugee applicants. Approximately 6,930 of the exemptions related to applicants who provided material support to a terrorist organization under duress – for example, Iraqi applicants who paid a ransom for a kidnapped family member. Please note that there was a typographical error for the number of total TRIG exemptions in the FY 2015 Report to Congress; as of June 2015, more than 13,560 TRIG exemptions had been granted to refugee applicants.

DHS/USCIS adjudication. The RSCs assist applicants in completing documentary requirements and schedule DHS/USCIS refugee eligibility interviews. If an applicant is conditionally approved for resettlement by DHS/USCIS, RSC staff guide the refugee through post-adjudication steps, including obtaining medical screening exams and attending cultural orientation programs. The RSC obtains sponsorship assurances and, once all required steps are completed, including all necessary security clearances, refers the case to IOM for transportation to the United States.

In FY 2016, NGOs (Church World Service, HIAS, and International Rescue Committee) worked under cooperative agreements with PRM as RSCs at locations in Austria (covering Austria and as of June, Israel), Kenya (covering sub-Saharan Africa), and Thailand (covering East Asia). International organizations (IOM and the International Catholic Migration Commission) supported refugee processing activities based in Ecuador, Jordan, Russia, Nepal, and Turkey which covered Latin America, the Middle East, South and Central Asia, and Europe. The Department of State supported refugee processing in Havana, Cuba.

Cultural Orientation

The Department of State strives to ensure that refugees who are accepted for admission to the United States are prepared for the profound life changes they will experience by providing cultural orientation programs prior to departure for the United States as well as upon arrival. It is critical that refugees have a realistic idea of what their new lives will be like, what services will be available to them, and what their responsibilities will be.

Every refugee family is offered a copy of *Welcome to the United States*, a resettlement guidebook developed with contributions from refugee resettlement workers, resettled refugees, and government officials. The current edition is available in twelve languages: Arabic, Burmese, Chin, Dari, English, Farsi, Karen, Kinyarwanda, Nepali, Somali, Spanish, and Swahili. The previous (2007) edition is still available in eight other languages: Albanian, Amharic, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, French, Kirundi, Russian, Tigrinya, and Vietnamese. Through this book, refugees have access to accurate information about the initial resettlement period before they arrive in the United States. The *Welcome to the United States* refugee orientation video is available in 12 languages: Arabic, Burmese, Chin, Dari, English, Farsi, Karen, Kinyarwanda, Nepali, Somali, Spanish, and Swahili. The 2004 version of the video is available in four other languages: Karenni, Kirundi, Russian, and Tigrinya. All of these materials are available to download free of charge at www.COResourceExchange.org.

In addition, the Department of State funds one- to five-day pre-departure orientation classes for eligible refugees at sites throughout the world. In an effort to further bridge the information gap for certain refugee groups, brief video presentations featuring the experience of recently resettled refugees of the same ethnic group are made available to refugee applicants overseas. Groups featured include refugees from Bhutan, Burma, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cuba, Darfur, and Iraq. *Faces of Resettlement* shows five individuals who entered the United States as refugees, from Bhutan, Burma, Burundi, Iraq, and Sudan. Each of them tells their own story of the ways in which they are rebuilding their lives in their new communities. *Faces of Resettlement* also includes interviews with receiving community members. This video is accompanied by discussion guides for community members, service providers, and refugees.

The Department of State also offers a curriculum for cultural orientation after refugees' arrival in the United States. Based on Reception and Placement (R&P) Program objectives and indicators, the curriculum was developed to provide domestic cultural orientation providers with lesson plans, tools, and techniques to help refugees develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they will need to adjust to new life in the U.S. In addition to lesson plans, the publication contains a User's Guide; a section on staff preparation; and a section on tools for trainers and orientation development, with sub-sections on topics such as instructional approach, working with groups of different sizes, incorporating English into orientation, and conducting needs assessments. A companion toolkit includes a model assessment intended to provide domestic orientation providers with a sample tool for assessing refugee understanding of orientation topics during the R&P period.

Transportation

The Department of State funds the international transportation of refugees resettled in the United States through a program administered by IOM. The cost of transportation is provided to refugees in the form of a loan. Refugees are responsible for repaying these loans over time, beginning six months after their arrival, although it is possible to request a deferral based on inability to begin paying at that time.

Reception and Placement (R&P)

In FY 2016, PRM funded cooperative agreements with nine private resettlement agencies to provide initial resettlement services to refugees arriving in the United States. The R&P agencies are responsible for providing initial reception and core services (including housing, furnishings, clothing and food, as

well as assistance with access to medical, employment, educational, and social services) to arriving refugees. These services are provided according to standards of care within a framework of outcomes and indicators developed jointly by the NGO community, state refugee coordinators, and U.S. government agencies. The nine organizations maintain a nationwide network of 309 affiliated offices in 180 locations to provide services. Two of the organizations also maintain a network of 27 affiliated offices through which unaccompanied refugee minors are placed into foster care, a program administered and funded by HHS/ORR.

Using R&P funds from PRM supplemented by funds and in-kind contributions from private and other sources, the participating agencies provide the following services, consistent with the terms of the R&P cooperative agreement:

- Sponsorship;
- Pre-arrival resettlement planning, including placement;
- Reception on arrival;
- Basic needs support (including housing, furnishings, food, and clothing) for at least 30 days;
- Cultural orientation;
- Assistance with access to health, employment, education, and other services, as needed; and
- Development and implementation of an initial resettlement service plan for each refugee.

OFFICE OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT (ORR)

Through the Refugee Act, Congress directed HHS/ORR to provide refugees with resettlement assistance that includes employment training, English language training, cash assistance (in a manner that promotes early independence), and job placement – including providing women with equal opportunities to employment as men. ORR’s mission is to help refugees transition into the United States by providing benefits and assistance to achieve self-sufficiency and become integrated members of society as soon as possible. To this end, ORR funds and administers various programs, some of which are highlighted below.

State-Administered and Wilson-Fish Programs

Under ORR’s state-administered or Wilson-Fish (WF) programs, refugees not eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are eligible to receive up to eight months of *Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)*. Refugees not eligible for Medicaid are eligible to

receive up to eight months of *Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA)* upon arrival. In state-administered programs that operate a publicly administered RCA program (33 states) RCA benefits are based on cash benefit levels established by state TANF programs. In states that operate their RCA program through a Public-Private Program (PPP) model (5 States) and WF states (12 States plus one county), the RCA benefit is based on the higher of the RCA rates outlined in the ORR regulations or the state TANF rates.

The WF program is an alternative to the traditional state-administered program, and is usually administered by local resettlement agencies. The WF program emphasizes early employment and economic self-sufficiency by integrating cash assistance, case management, and employment services, and by incorporating innovative strategies for the provision of cash assistance (e.g. financial bonuses for early employment). WF programs also serve as a replacement for the State when the State government declines to participate in the ORR-funded refugee assistance program.

ORR also provides states/WF programs with *Formula Refugee Social Services (RSS)* and *Targeted Assistance (TAG)* funds. ORR distributes these funds based on arrival numbers and refugee concentration levels in counties with a high utilization of public assistance. Funding is time limited, and refugees can only access RSS and TAG services up to five years after arrival. These services include: employment services, on-the-job training, English language instruction, vocational training, case management, translation/interpreter services, social adjustment services, health-related services, home management, childcare and transportation.

Additionally, to assist specific groups of refugees, ORR administers the specialized programs through states/WF programs, including Cuban-Haitian, Older Refugees, Refugee School Impact, and Targeted Assistance.

ORR Matching Grant Program

The ORR Matching Grant program (MG) is provided through the nine national resettlement agencies that provide R & P services and their resettlement affiliates in 42 states. The objective of MG is to guide newly-arrived refugee households toward economic self-sufficiency through employment within four to six months of program eligibility (which usually begins on the date of arrival in the United States). In MG, self-sufficiency is defined as total household income from employment that enables a family unit to support itself without receipt of public

cash assistance. For each MG participant, ORR awards \$2,200 to participating national resettlement agencies, which then allocate funds to their networks of local affiliates. Agencies provide a 50% match to every federal dollar.

Through the ORR MG Program, local service providers ensure core maintenance services for a minimum of 120 days which include housing, transportation, food, and a cash allowance. Clients also receive intensive case management and employment services throughout the 180 day service period. Refugees who are unable to attain self-sufficiency by day 120 or 180 may access RCA for the remainder of the eight month eligibility period. In FY 2015, nearly 30,000 individuals were newly enrolled in the program, and of those enrolled in the program for 180 days, 82% achieved self-sufficiency. Approximately 30% of refugees who arrive in a fiscal year participate in the ORR MG Program.

ORR Refugee Health

ORR addresses the health and emotional well-being of refugees by providing technical assistance on Refugee Medical Assistance and domestic refugee medical screening, supporting mental health awareness, managing the Services for Survivors of Torture and Refugee Health Promotion grant programs, and other health initiatives.

ORR Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) Program

ORR provides funds to 15 states which administer over 20 Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) programs. States contract with local licensed foster care agencies that provide specialized placements and services to URMs. URMs live in various placements including: traditional and therapeutic foster homes, group homes, semi-independent and independent living and residential treatment centers, and homes of relatives. URMs receive various services including: English language training, educational and vocational training, cultural preservation, social integration, family tracing, permanency planning, independent living, medical care, and mental health care. ORR regulations require states to provide services to URM in parity with the state's Title IV-B foster care plan.

Other ORR Discretionary Refugee Service Programs

ORR also provides funding to non-profit agencies to carry out special initiatives or programs for refugees including: case management, ethnic community development, home-based child care business development, individual development accounts, microenterprise development, and agricultural projects.

The Preferred Communities Program is implemented through the nine resettlement agencies and focuses on building capacity to receive an increasingly vulnerable refugee population. The program supports long-term case management services to the more at risk populations including, but not limited to, women heads of household and refugees with significant medical and mental health needs. Additionally, the program has allowed resettlement agencies the flexibility to address unanticipated arrivals such as refugees arriving in underserved areas, increased Cuban/Haitian arrivals and secondary migrants.

ORR Technical Assistance

ORR provides technical assistance (TA) to resettlement stakeholders through various organizations that have relevant expertise. Currently ORR's TA providers assist stakeholders in the areas of community engagement/integration, employment, mental health, youth initiatives, services to survivors of torture, and monitoring.

REGIONAL PROGRAMS

TABLE II

PROPOSED FY 2017 REGIONAL CEILINGS BY PRIORITY

<u>AFRICA</u>	
Priority 1 Individual Referrals	20,000
Priority 2 Groups	14,500
Priority 3 Family Reunification Refugees	500
	<u>Total Proposed: 35,000</u>
<u>EAST ASIA</u>	
Priority 1 Individual Referrals	1,800
Priority 2 Groups	10,000
Priority 3 Family Reunification Refugees	200
	<u>Total Proposed: 12,000</u>
<u>EUROPE / CENTRAL ASIA</u>	
Priority 1 Individual Referrals	990
Priority 2 Groups	3,000
Priority 3 Family Reunification Refugees	10
	<u>Total Proposed: 4,000</u>
<u>LATIN AMERICA / CARIBBEAN</u>	
Priority 1 Individual Referrals	950
Priority 2 Groups	4,000
Priority 3 Family Reunification Refugees	50
	<u>Total Proposed: 5,000</u>
<u>NEAR EAST / SOUTH ASIA</u>	
Priority 1 Individual Referrals	19,000
Priority 2 Groups	20,900
Priority 3 Family Reunification Refugees	100
	<u>Total Proposed: 40,000</u>
<u>UNALLOCATED RESERVE</u>	<u>14,000</u>
<u>TOTAL PROPOSED CEILING:</u>	<u>110,000</u>

AFRICA

There are currently nearly 5 million refugees across the African continent, constituting roughly 25 percent of the global refugee population. Refugee numbers in Africa increased by nearly half a million in 2015 due to new or intensified conflicts across the continent. There has been some progress finding opportunities for local integration in host countries in Africa but limited refugee repatriation. Third country resettlement has increased from the continent but falls short of needs.

New and ongoing conflicts in three countries – Burundi, Nigeria, and South Sudan – are responsible for the growth in refugee numbers in 2015 and 2016. In Burundi, early 2015 election-related violence and the aftermath forced over 250,000 refugees to flee to neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda; this outflow is expected to continue throughout 2016. Instability and violence in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger have displaced more than 2.4 million people in the region, including 2.2 million Nigerian internally displaced persons (IDPs) and some 170,000 Nigerian refugees to neighboring countries. Cameroon, Niger and Chad continue to struggle with rising numbers of IDPs. In South Sudan, ethnic-fueled political conflict that erupted in December 2013 continues. Nearly 1.7 million South Sudanese are internally displaced and total refugee numbers have now reached nearly 840,000.

Ongoing conflict in the DRC and Sudan has also continued to generate new refugee outflows over the past few years. Conflict in eastern DRC since mid-2012 has led steady flows of Congolese to seek asylum in Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi, bringing the total number of Congolese refugees to nearly 534,000. Conflict in Sudan's Darfur region continued to displace people internally. The ongoing conflict with rebel groups in Sudan's Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states has forced some 300,000 Sudanese refugees to flee to South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya since June 2011. The steady outflow of Eritreans also continues, not only to refugee camps in Ethiopia and eastern Sudan, but also further north as Eritreans attempt to migrate to Europe and beyond. Some 450,000 Eritreans have fled political repression, forced conscription, and economic collapse over the past decade.

Africa's refugee numbers have also been augmented by conflicts beyond the continent, primarily in the neighboring Near East region. North Africa has long hosted large numbers of Palestinian refugees. The ongoing crisis in Syria has added more than 140,000 new refugees to the region including 120,000 in Egypt and 18,000 in Libya. The crisis in Yemen has led some 15,000 Yemenis and Somalis living in Yemen to flee to Djibouti and Somalia in 2015 to date, with

higher numbers expected. No progress was made over the past year in seeking a resolution to the Western Saharan conflict that would enable an estimated 90,000 Sahrawi refugees in Algeria to return home.

Most African countries honor the principle of first asylum and most have allowed refugees to remain – and in many cases to effectively integrate economically and/or socially – until voluntary repatriation is possible. Some countries, such as Cameroon, Egypt, and Sudan, have forcibly returned refugees over the past year. For countries growing weary of hosting large refugee caseloads, we continue to advocate for first asylum and inclusion for refugees. And, for those countries that lack formal mechanisms for asylum, we continue to advocate for the establishment of such systems in consultation with UNHCR.

Religious Freedom

In Sub-Saharan Africa, people are generally free to practice their chosen religions. Governments regularly provide for and respect freedom of religion, although in some countries, such as Eritrea and Sudan, religious freedom is limited, particularly in the midst of ethnic and other conflicts.

The Government of the State of Eritrea is responsible for severe religious freedom abuses. In recent years the country has engaged in serious religious repression by harassing, arresting, and detaining members of independent evangelical groups, including Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses (who lost certain rights of citizenship for not participating in the 1993 national referendum). Detainees are held in harsh conditions and some have died in custody. The government has also sought greater control over the four state-approved religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church, and the Sunni Islamic community. The government reportedly holds individuals who are jailed for their religious affiliation at various locations. Often detainees are not formally charged, accorded due process, or allowed access to their families. While many are ostensibly jailed for evasion of military conscription, significant numbers were being held solely for their religious beliefs; the U.S. Committee for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) estimates that between 1,200 and 3,000 individuals are being detained on religious grounds. At least three Jehovah's Witnesses had been detained since September 24, 1994 (almost 22 years), reportedly for evading compulsory military service, a term far beyond the maximum legal penalty of two years for refusing to perform national service.

In Sudan, the government continues to deny permits for the construction of new churches, detain church members, close or demolish pre-existing churches, restrict non-Muslim religious groups and missionaries from operating in or entering the country, censor religious materials and leaders, and arrest or intimidate suspected proselytizers. The government places restrictions on non-Muslims in a manner that is inconsistent with domestic and international obligations to uphold freedom of religion. Although there is no penalty for converting from another religion to Islam, converting from Islam is punishable by death. Authorities express their strong prejudice against conversion by occasionally subjecting converts to intense scrutiny, ostracism, and intimidation, or by encouraging converts to leave the country.

Both Eritrea and Sudan are currently designated as “Countries of Particular Concern” (CPC) for particularly severe violations of religious freedom by the Department of State under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. The USRAP continues to be available through Priority 1 referrals to Sudanese, Eritrean, and other refugees who are victims of religious intolerance. Refugees from Eritrea and Sudan with certain refugee or asylee family members in the United States have access to the USRAP through Priority 3.

In Somalia the provisional federal constitution provides for freedom of religion within limits, although it enshrines Islam as the state religion. The law prohibits proselytism for any religion other than Islam. Since its inception in July 2012, the Federal Government of Somalia has made incremental progress to establish institutions and expanding its authority, but its capacity to enforce the provisional constitution remains extremely limited, particularly outside of Mogadishu. There have been reports that non-Muslim individuals experience discrimination, violence, and detention because of their religious beliefs. Refugees from Somalia with certain refugee or asylee family members in the United States also have access to the USRAP through Priority 3.

Voluntary Repatriation

Voluntary repatriation to improved conditions in the home country is the most common and desirable durable solution, however there have been few refugee returns on the continent in recent years. Recent outflows have far surpassed repatriation reversing a trend of falling refugee numbers since the mid-1990s. Large-scale organized repatriations to Angola, Liberia, Rwanda, and Burundi are largely complete, but residual populations remain. In the case of Burundi, many who returned in the early 2000s have fled again. UNHCR recommended cessation of prima facie refugee status for refugees from Angola and Liberia effective June 30, 2012, and for pre-1999 caseload Rwandan refugees

effective June 30, 2013. Efforts continue to repatriate those who still wish to return and to locally integrate residual populations where asylum countries agree to provide permanent residence or citizenship. The local integration of former Angolan refugees in Zambia progressed though resources are a constraint.

Smaller-scale repatriation efforts continue throughout the continent. In West Africa, out of an estimated 300,000 individuals who fled the 2010-2011 election-related violence in Côte d'Ivoire, over 240,000 have now returned home. Repatriation was delayed in 2014 and 2015 due to the Ebola crisis and related border closures but started up again in December 2015. UNHCR anticipates assisting with the return of 25,000 Ivoirian refugees from Liberia in 2016. In Mali, while UNHCR is not yet promoting refugee return to northern Mali, more than 40,000 refugees have returned spontaneously in to safe regions under government control but periodic outbreaks of violence in 2015 in northern Mali have deterred would-be returnees and caused new refugee outflows to Niger during the year.

In East Africa, the repatriation to South Sudan that started in 2005 was largely concluded in 2011 with the return of more than 370,000 refugees. However, due to widespread conflict since 2013, all repatriation has stopped and the focus has instead shifted to emergency response to the new refugees. UNHCR, the Government of Kenya, and the Government of Somalia signed a tripartite agreement in 2013 that established a legal framework for the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees from Kenya, and UNHCR has supported the voluntary return of approximately 13,300 Somalis to date to nine identified "safe" areas within Somalia. Most parts of Somalia, however, are not conducive to safe and sustainable refugee return. Despite the efforts of some asylum countries, including Israel, to repatriate Eritrean refugees, UNHCR has strongly discouraged returns to Eritrea given ongoing political repression and harsh treatment of returnees.

In Central Africa, while there were over 500,000 refugee returns to Burundi from 2002 to 2014, election-related violence that erupted in Burundi in April 2015, has generated over 250,000 refugees to date, many of them former refugees. Although the majority of Rwandan refugees returned home in the late 1990's, some 100,000 are thought to remain in exile. With the cessation of prima facie refugee status for pre-1999 Rwandan refugees on June 30, 2013, most remaining Rwandans will be required either to repatriate or to seek non-refugee means of remaining in asylum countries. UNHCR had made significant progress in repatriating Congolese to eastern DRC earlier in the past decade. However, renewed hostilities between the Congolese government and other armed groups across eastern DRC erased most of these gains. Eastern DRC is too insecure for large-scale refugee return at this point. UNHCR did conclude its repatriation program for some 130,000 Congolese refugees to western DRC's Equateur

Province from 2012 through 2014. The relatively peaceful elections in the Central African Republic have raised hopes of refugee repatriation but while we anticipate some spontaneous returns to assess the situation, most refugees are still wary.

Local Integration

While most African countries adhere to encampment policies for refugees, many have allowed, or even encouraged, refugees to pursue economic activities, a sort of de facto integration, by providing land for refugee farmers or permitting refugees to open small businesses. Despite such de facto integration, refugees residing among the local population do not necessarily enjoy the same rights, entitlements to social services, or economic opportunities available to citizens or permanent residents. As a result, this piecemeal integration is often an interim, rather than a durable, solution for many African refugees. However, strengthened partnerships with development actors, including the World Bank, shows promise in facilitating more sustainable socio-economic integration of refugees.

In recent years, a number of African countries have offered more formal integration as a durable solution for residual refugee populations who will not or cannot repatriate. Among member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the issuance of identity documents by home governments and subsequent regularization of immigration status allows refugees to access legal residency and the right to work in host countries; Ivoirians will be the latest refugee population to benefit under these ECOWAS protocols as UNHCR pursues local integration for those who wish to remain in their countries of asylum in the coming years. Senegal offered Mauritanian refugees who wished to remain in Senegal the option of becoming Senegalese citizens in 2007, and UNHCR, in partnership with the Senegalese government, launched a campaign in 2012 to provide digitized and biometric identity cards to some 19,000 refugees (of whom 14,000 were Mauritanians). The card guarantees holders the same rights as Senegalese citizens, including the right to residence in the country and to travel to ECOWAS member states. In 2015, Mali provided birth certificates to some 8,000 Mauritanian refugee children, facilitating access to state services such as education and paving the way for them to eventually apply for Malian citizenship.

In Southern Africa, the Government of Zambia has offered local integration to some 15,000 former Angolan refugees and up to 4,000 Rwandans. The 2012 initiative offers permanent residence status to the former Angolan refugees -- mainly refugees who arrived before 1986, were born in Zambia, or are married to Zambians. The Government of Zambia has approved 6,000 applicants who meet eligibility criteria.

In East Africa, the Government of Tanzania has finalized citizenship for nearly 200,000 1972-era Burundi former refugees. While not offering a formal integration program, Uganda has permitted refugees to live and work outside of camps – most are in rural settlements where they have access to land or in urban areas. Ethiopia formally introduced an out-of-camp policy for Eritrean refugees in August 2010, allowing Eritreans to live outside camps if they are able to support themselves or if they have someone to sponsor them financially. Approximately 3,500 Eritreans are part of this program now. While it does not give Eritrean refugees the right to work, it does offer the ability to pursue additional educational opportunities, including tertiary education. In 2013, Sudan agreed to issue work permits to some 30,000 Eritrean refugees who wish to work outside of refugee camps in eastern Sudan, although only a handful have been issued permits to date.

Third-Country Resettlement

Given the political and economic volatility in many parts of Africa, resettlement to third countries outside the region is an essential durable solution and element of protection for certain refugees. With limited opportunities for permanent integration in many countries of asylum and the protracted nature of some refugee situations, the need for third-country resettlement of African refugees is expected to continue. In recent years, UNHCR has increasingly viewed resettlement as an important tool of protection for refugees in Africa, and has increased resettlement referrals this past year.

FY 2016 U.S. Admissions

We project 27,500 African refugee arrivals in FY 2016. Two countries of origin – Somalia and DRC – still account for the vast majority of U.S. refugee admissions from Africa, followed by Eritrea, Sudan and Ethiopia. UNHCR's enhanced Congolese Resettlement Strategy effort has reached its stated goal to refer 50,000 DRC refugees for resettlement from Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Burundi to resettlement countries over five years. In FY 2016, the number of Congolese resettled to the United States (more than 14,000) will for the first time surpass the number of Somalis. UNHCR will continue to refer Congolese refugees from the four countries, as the resettlement need for Congolese from the eastern Congo still exists.

We expect to admit nearly 7,000 refugees from our two largest processing locations in Africa: Kenya and Ethiopia, plus another 600 from other locations in East Africa. Close to 5,500 refugees will depart for the United States from Kenya this year, mostly Somalis in the Kakuma and Dadaab camps. PRM continues to fund movements of refugee applicants from Dadaab to Kakuma for the purposes of

DHS/USCIS interview and adjudication, since DHS/USCIS staff cannot work at Dadaab due to the security conditions. Applicants return to Dadaab for medical exams and other post-DHS/USCIS steps until their departure for the United States. Admissions from Ethiopia also continue to be strong, with approximately 3,500 U.S. arrivals projected this year. Populations include primarily Somalis from camps in the east and Eritreans from the northern camps, including approximately 60 Eritrean unaccompanied refugee minors. We also will resettle smaller numbers of Sudanese from camps in the west.

The United States continues to interview refugees from the Central African Republic in southern Chad and Sudanese Darfuri refugees in eastern Chad. We expect to admit nearly 600 refugees from Chad in FY 2016, part of an effort to build a large resettlement operation for Darfuri refugees in eastern Chad. An additional 450 refugees from various locations in West Africa are also expected to be admitted in FY 2016.

From Southern Africa, we expect to admit 2,500 refugees – primarily Somalis from South Africa and Congolese from Malawi, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Outside of sub-Saharan Africa, we anticipate approximately 3,000 Sudanese, Somali, Ethiopian, Eritrean, and other sub-Saharan African refugees who will be arriving primarily from Egypt, Malta, or via one of the UNHCR Emergency Transit Centers in Romania and Slovakia. In all, we expect to admit refugees of nearly 30 African nationalities, processed in dozens of countries, during FY 2016.

FY 2017 U.S. Resettlement Program

We propose 35,000 resettlement numbers for African refugees in FY 2017 that will largely parallel the populations admitted in FY 2016. As a result of discussions within the Department of State, UNHCR, the NGO community, and DHS/USCIS to identify caseloads, PRM has identified a number of nationalities and groups for processing during FY 2017.

In the Great Lakes region, processing of Congolese in Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania (and Burundi if the situation allows) is expected to result in a total of 15,000 departures. Approximately 10,000 of these admissions will be the result of a P-2 group designation for Congolese refugees in Tanzania and from the camps in Rwanda. Departures from Uganda will result in 5,000 arrivals. It is yet to be determined whether the violence in Burundi that has prevented processing of Congolese there will result in lower arrival numbers from Burundi in FY 2016.

From East Africa, we expect to resettle just over 9,000 refugees each from Kenya and Ethiopia, primarily Somalis and Eritreans. We also expect UNHCR to continue referring Eritrean unaccompanied refugee minors at a rate of about 100 per year from refugee camps in northern Ethiopia.

From southern Africa, we expect to admit 3,000 refugees consisting primarily of Somalis from South Africa and Congolese from Mozambique, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

In eastern Chad, UNHCR is establishing infrastructure for a robust resettlement program for Sudanese Darfuris with funding from PRM. This will be in addition to the continued processing of Central African Republic refugees from southern Chad. Total admission numbers from West Africa and Chad are expected to be approximately 1,000.

Outside of sub-Saharan Africa, we anticipate 2,000 Sudanese, Somali, Ethiopian, Eritrean and other sub-Saharan African refugees will be admitted from Egypt and Malta, and through the Emergency Transit Centers in Slovakia and Romania.

Proposed FY 2017 Africa program to include arrivals from the following categories:

<i>Priority 1 Individual Referrals</i>	<i>20,000</i>
<i>Priority 2 Groups</i>	<i>14,500</i>
<i>Priority 3 Family Reunification</i>	<i><u>500</u></i>
<i>Total Proposed Ceiling</i>	<i>35,000</i>

EAST ASIA

Several countries in East Asia host large and diverse refugee and asylum seeker populations. Recent years have seen important developments for these groups. Thailand, Bangladesh, and Malaysia continue to host large numbers of Burmese refugees and asylum-seekers, and thousands more are in the capital cities of Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and New Delhi, including Burmese, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, West Africans, Syrians, Palestinians, and others. The number of persons of concern to UNHCR across the archipelago of Indonesia has also increased to nearly 13,800, including some 6,400 refugees, in recent years.

The U.S. government continues to press for meaningful political and democratic reforms in Burma, as well as a national ceasefire agreement with ethnic minority groups. The international community is engaged in discussions regarding the voluntary return of Burmese refugees, but acknowledges that ongoing conflict with armed ethnic groups, particularly in Kachin and Shan States, peace and national reconciliation efforts, and limited access to humanitarian and development assistance make large-scale return of refugees in safety and with dignity a slow, gradual process.

The resettlement of more than 100,000 Burmese refugees from Thailand since 2006 – including more than 85,000 to the United States – has significantly reduced the number of Burmese refugees in the camps who are eligible for the U.S. P-2 resettlement program. After more than seven years of large-scale resettlement, we have arrived at the natural conclusion of the group resettlement program with specific eligibility criteria for Burmese refugees who were re-registered by UNHCR in 2005 and formally registered by the Royal Thai Government (RTG). P-2 processing should conclude within one year. Those who do not exercise this option will be able to remain in the camps until safe and voluntary returns are possible. The United States will continue to accept individual referrals from UNHCR for all nationalities, including registered Burmese.

Since 2006, UNHCR Malaysia has operated the second largest refugee status determination program in the world and Malaysia is currently one of the largest resettlement countries in the U.S. program with some 8,200 projected refugee departures in FY16 and more than 69,500 since 2006. As of the end of March 2016, there were 158,794 persons of concern registered with UNHCR in Malaysia of which 144,197, or 90.8 percent, are from Burma. In addition, some 14,600 asylum-seekers and refugees from various countries – primarily Pakistan, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, and Sri Lanka – are registered with UNHCR. Malaysia is not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, but generally tolerates the presence of refugees.

The systematic persecution and discrimination of members of the Rohingya minority from Rakhine State, Burma have resulted in large numbers fleeing Rakhine State to seek safety in Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, and other countries in the region for over five decades. The mid-2015 migrant crisis in the Indian Ocean began to unfold on May 1 when Thai authorities discovered mass graves of migrants in the south and began cracking down on migrant smuggling operations. The Administration continues to actively support the ongoing regional response that stresses the need to address the root causes of the crisis in source countries, including by promoting and protecting the human rights of members of vulnerable populations in source countries.

The last large influx of approximately 250,000 Rohingya from Rakhine State to the Cox's Bazar district in southeastern Bangladesh began in July 1991. Between 1992 and 2005, over 236,000 UNHCR-registered Rohingya refugees were voluntarily repatriated from Cox's Bazar to Rakhine State, most of them immediately after their arrival to Bangladesh. No repatriation operation has taken place since. UNHCR supports over 32,600 refugees in two official refugee camps (Kutupalong and Nayapara) in Cox's Bazar. In addition, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) estimates that **300,000 – 500,000** undocumented Rohingya currently reside in various villages and towns outside the refugee camps and in makeshift settlement sites.

In February 2014, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) announced its national strategy on “Myanmar Refugees and Undocumented Myanmar Nationals in Bangladesh”. The GOB completed the main census of the undocumented Rohingya during the first half of June and plans to publish the census results in December. The issuance of information cards will follow which we understand will ensure protection and access to basic services, including freedom of movement, access to livelihood, and education opportunities to the Rohingya who took part in the census. The U.S. government is encouraged by GOB commitments made in the national strategy, including the resumption of third country resettlement. We are prepared to resume resettlement activity immediately upon notification by the GOB that we may proceed. In addition, we expect ongoing UNHCR referrals of urban Burmese in India.

As reflected in the North Korean Human Rights Act, the United States remains deeply concerned about the human rights situation of North Koreans both inside the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and in various countries in the region. The United States began resettling interested, eligible North Korean refugees and their family members in 2006 and remains committed to continuing this program.

Religious Freedom

Although many governments in East Asia do not restrict religious freedom, religious believers face serious persecution in several countries. The DPRK, China, and Burma are designated by the Department of State as Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom.

The DPRK severely restricts religious freedom, including organized religious activity, except for that which is supervised tightly by officially recognized groups linked to the government. Although the DPRK constitution

provides for “freedom of religious belief,” genuine religious freedom does not exist. Information about the day-to-day life of religious persons in the country is limited. Religious and human rights groups outside of the country have provided numerous reports that members of underground churches have been beaten, arrested, tortured, or killed because of their religious beliefs.

While the constitutions of China, Burma, and Vietnam provide for freedom of religion, in practice, these governments restrict or repress religious activities of some members of religious communities in a manner that is inconsistent with their commitments to uphold freedom of religion.

The Chinese government continues to harass and interfere with unregistered religious groups, most notably the unofficial Catholic churches loyal to the Holy See, Protestant “house churches,” some Muslim groups (especially ethnic Uighur Muslims in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region), members of the Falun Gong, and Tibetan Buddhists reverent to the Dalai Lama. China additionally reprimanded members of government-sanctioned churches for advocacy on behalf of their church communities. Certain religious or spiritual groups are banned by law. The criminal law defines some banned groups as “evil cults” and those belonging to them can be sentenced to prison or administrative detention. This includes Falun Gong and some other qigong-based groups, in addition to some Christian groups. Although legislation officially abolished the Reeducation through Labor (RTL) system in December 2013, religious believers have been harassed, arrested, detained in “black jails” without due process and sentenced to long jail terms. There have been credible allegations of torture.

In Burma, the government implemented considerable political and economic reforms, resulting in improved respect for many human rights. However, the government continues to discriminate against members of religious minority groups. Members of some ethnic groups, including those not formally recognized as citizens – such as the Muslim Rohingya in northern Rakhine State – are not protected under anti-discrimination laws. In 2012, intercommunal conflict led to the death of nearly 200 Rohingya and the displacement of 140,000 people. Throughout 2013-2015 isolated incidents of violence against Rohingya individuals continued to take place.

Government authorities, through various policies and practices, subjected Rohingya Muslims to physical abuse, arbitrary arrest and detention, restrictions on religious practice and travel, and discrimination in employment, social services, and access to citizenship. Religious minority populations, including Muslims, Christians, and other religious minorities, experienced arrest and detention, restrictions on religious practice, and various forms of discrimination. At the same

time, the government continued to support interfaith dialogue and provided some members of the international community and international organizations greater access to ethnic minority areas.

Vietnam and the United States signed an agreement on religious freedom in May 2005, under which Vietnam committed to improving the protection of religious freedom in Vietnam. As a result of the progress Vietnam made after signing the agreement, the U.S. Government removed Vietnam from the CPC list in November 2006. While there have been some improvements, Vietnam's religious freedom record has been mixed. Progress has been made with regard to the registration/recognition of religious groups and congregations and many religious groups have experienced expanded freedom of assembly. However, religious organizations must undergo an onerous registration process for almost all normal religious activities. There are also reports of harassment at the local level, including through the use of land laws. Several Protestant congregations in rural areas continue to report harassment, including beatings and forced renunciations.

Nationals of the DPRK, Vietnam, China, Laos, and Burma have access to the USRAP. North Korean refugees also have access to family reunification processing through Priority 3.

Voluntary Repatriation

Although the Burmese government has taken steps to implement democratic and political reforms, ongoing fighting continues in Kachin and northern Shan States, and tensions remain in Rakhine State since the June and October 2012 violence. The new government continues to work towards a national reconciliation and peace process but it is too early to tell. We are hopeful that substantial progress towards this goal will be made in the near future. UNHCR continues with its planning for facilitated returns and continues its discussions with the RTG, Burmese government, NGOs working on the Thailand-Burma border, and the Karen and Karenni refugee communities; however, conditions are not yet conducive for large-scale returns and refugees often cite the lack of infrastructure, land and security issues in southeast Burma. The United States and other donor governments continue to engage regularly with the Thai government concerning the future of the nine refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border.

Local Integration

Due to fears of a "pull factor," countries in the region have traditionally been reluctant to integrate refugees or to grant asylum. Local integration remains a difficult option, due to opposition from host countries, such as Thailand, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and India. UNHCR and the international community

continue to advocate for these governments to make policy changes relating to refugees, and to expand humanitarian protection and assistance space for refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern.

Third-Country Resettlement

The United States continues to lead third country resettlement efforts in the region. Other countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the Nordic countries, resettle refugees referred by UNHCR. In FY 2016, the United States processed UNHCR-referred refugee cases in China, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia and Thailand.

FY 2016 U.S. Admissions

We expect to admit close to 14,000 refugees from East Asia in FY 2016. This will include nearly 4,600 members of Burmese ethnic minorities (mostly Karen, Karenni, and Kachin) living in camps along the Thai-Burma border, over 7,900 Burmese (of various ethnic minorities) in Malaysia, and a smaller number of urban refugees of various nationalities in the region.

FY 2017 U.S. Resettlement Program

We expect to admit up to 12,000 refugees from East Asia in FY 2017. This will include up to 3,500 members of Burmese ethnic minorities (mostly Karen and Karenni) living in camps along the Thai-Burma border, some 5,500 Burmese (of various ethnic minorities) in Malaysia, and a number of urban refugees of various nationalities in the region.

Proposed FY 2017 East Asia program to include arrivals from the following categories:

<i>Priority 1 Individual Referrals</i>	<i>1,800</i>
<i>Priority 2 Groups</i>	<i>10,000</i>
<i>Priority 3 Family Reunification</i>	<i>200</i>
<i>Total Proposed Ceiling</i>	<i>12,000</i>

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

In 2015, Europe experienced a dramatic increase in asylum seekers. Europe continued to host large refugee populations and other persons affected by conflict, including those who, over the last two decades, have been left in situations of protracted displacement – some in dire conditions. In its 2016-2017 Global Appeal, UNHCR reported that its priorities are to provide emergency assistance to refugee arrivals and mixed movements, safeguard asylum space and provide acceptable reception conditions, build and maintain fair asylum systems throughout Europe, and provide durable solutions to displaced populations in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and in Ukraine.

The large increase in the number of people risking their lives at sea in search of safety in Europe made it the largest mass migration since the Second World War. By the end of 2015, there were over a million arrivals in Italy and Greece. Over 850,000 arrived in Greece alone. The European Union after initially struggling to arrive at a coordinated policy to address the situation has agreed upon a Joint Action Plan with Turkey to reduce these flows. Under the plan, the EU has promised to provide over 6 billion euros to Turkey in humanitarian assistance and development aid to help support programs for refugees in Turkey. The plan also allows for Greece to return to Turkey those ineligible for international protection in Greece. The EU requires that the agreement be implemented in full compliance with international and EU law.

In light of this crisis, the challenge for Europe remains two-fold. Providing humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees arriving on their shores after undertaking dangerous maritime journeys and integrating the more than one million who arrived last year. UNHCR and IOM published a Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Europe to provide humanitarian assistance in affected countries including Turkey and Greece. The United States has contributed almost \$44 million to international organizations in humanitarian assistance to provide life sustaining assistance, protection to vulnerable populations and registration assistance to affected countries. The long-term integration challenges are most acute in Germany, Sweden, Austria and Finland, which received the bulk of the asylum seekers last year. We anticipate that many other countries will face challenges (albeit at a smaller scale) as they work to follow through with commitments to relocate individuals from Greece and Italy and/or participate in voluntary resettlement programs.

Despite the fact that a majority of countries in the region are party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, countries' compliance with these instruments remains problematic. UNHCR and

other stakeholders continue to build host country protection capacity and are helping to strengthen asylum systems and protection laws in the region; however, many of these countries have been slow or reluctant to recognize and integrate refugees and other at-risk individuals. The protection provided by some governments in the region to refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants is limited and public intolerance, including attacks against members of minority populations, is common. There are documented cases of refoulement. UNHCR has been working with many of these governments to establish and/or reform asylum procedures and refugee protection laws.

The 1990's break-up of the Soviet Union created newly independent states with sizeable populations of stateless individuals due to gaps in nationality laws and inconsistent implementation of those laws. Difficulty in establishing citizenship at the time of succession has created subsequent problems for children born to an undocumented parent(s). The problem of statelessness remains in the region, although some states, such as Turkmenistan, have taken steps to register stateless individuals and facilitate their acquisition of nationality.

According to UNHCR, as of April 2016, there were over 360,000 refugees and IDPs in the Balkans, almost all of whom have been displaced for a decade or longer. Over 200,000 persons of this population are displaced from Kosovo, most of whom currently live in Serbia. UNHCR estimates that more than 90,000 individuals in this group are in need of assistance. Since 2000, the overall level of return to Kosovo from Serbia has been low. While there have been over 26,000 voluntary returns of minorities to Kosovo since the conflict ended, housing, documentation issues, a lack of employment opportunity, and occasional violence directed against ethnic Serbs in Kosovo has limited continuing return prospects.

Despite the situation in Kosovo, since 2010, the countries of the region – with the assistance of the international community – made significant progress toward resolving a large part of the refugee situation in the Balkans. A November 2011 ministerial meeting in Belgrade brought together Ministers of Foreign Affairs from Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro to sign a Joint Declaration expressing their collective will to resolve the protracted refugee and displacement situation. They committed their countries to a Regional Housing Program (RHP) for refugees and IDPs supported by international donors.

The RHP was designed to create durable solutions for up to 74,000 of the most vulnerable refugees and IDPs in those countries. While principally affecting housing, the RHP has established the Regional Coordination Forum to discuss other pertinent issues such as unpaid pensions, civil documentation, exchange of data and other public information. An international donors' conference in April 2012 succeeded in raising over \$340 million (€260 million) in pledges to support

the RHP over five years. The United States has provided \$20 million between FY12 and FY14, and U.S. involvement is seen as a critical ingredient to the RHP's success. With over a dozen projects approved and several well-underway, we expect FY16 and FY17 to be the years where we see housing solutions to be completed and delivered to a large number of beneficiaries eligible for the RHP.

Although governments have taken important steps to assist individuals displaced by the collapse of the Soviet Union and related conflicts, IDPs and returnees still await housing compensation, restitution, or alternative accommodation provision in the North and South Caucasus. The Caucasus region, comprised of parts of Russia, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, still hosts over 1.3 million persons of concern for PRM. The Nagorno-Karabakh War displaced over 800,000 Azerbaijanis in several waves between 1988 and 1994. Today 600,000 IDPs remain, almost 7 percent of Azerbaijan's population. The vast majority live in temporary shelters, administrative buildings, dormitories, and hostels. The government is increasingly providing housing and livelihood support to vulnerable IDPs, but more needs to be done to support integration to aid its displaced population.

Armenia received 350,000 refugees from Azerbaijan, of whom almost 3,000 remain as refugees. A large number emigrated to other countries, and nearly 90,000 were ultimately naturalized in Armenia. Many refugees and former refugees continue to live in unsuitable collective housing or remote villages with insufficient access to government services. A struggling economy and the recent influx of an estimated 17,000 Syrian-Armenians has left the Armenian government few resources to address refugee concerns, and the country remains dependent on international humanitarian and development assistance. Georgia also has been affected by large population movements since the 1990s as consequences of the breakup of the Soviet Union and the occupation of two regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Although an estimated 147,000 people have returned to their homes in the Gali district (in the Abkhazia region), secured a durable housing solution elsewhere in Georgia, or remained in their original places of residence near the South Ossetia region, approximately 265,000 remain displaced from the 1993 and 2008 wars.

Finally, in Ukraine, fighting between government troops and combined Russian-Separatist forces continues despite the signing of ceasefire agreements in September 2014, February 2015, and September 2015. Russia's attempted occupation of Crimea, and the fighting in parts of eastern Ukraine have resulted in over two million people displaced from their homes, including over 1.3 million to neighboring countries. Although most IDPs have settled in regions bordering the conflict zone, they are increasingly settling in more remote areas of the country as

host communities reach absorption capacity. Integration opportunities are limited for displaced individuals as displacement increases, and needs outstrip the response capacity of local governments and community groups.

Religious Freedom

The status of religious freedom varies widely across Europe and Central Asia. Some countries place legal restrictions or prohibitions on the wearing of religious attire in schools, in government employment, or in public, particularly impacting Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Sikhs.

Several countries in the region mandate the registration of religious groups. Registration typically is required to rent or own property, hold religious services, appoint military and prison chaplains, and receive state subsidies. Restitution of religious properties is an issue yet to be fully resolved. Nontraditional religious groups are sometimes labeled as “sects” or “cults” by their home governments and may be subject to harassment and discrimination.

Uzbekistan’s policy is to ban Islamic groups it broadly determines as extremist and to criminalize membership in such groups. In Turkmenistan, there were reports in 2014 of beatings, imprisonment, arbitrary detention, threats of sexual assault, searches, confiscation of religious materials, and verbal abuse against religious minorities, particularly Jehovah’s Witnesses. Under Tajikistan’s law, persons under the age of 18 cannot participate in public religious activities and a ruling by Tajikistan’s highest Islamic religious body ban women from the majority Hanafi Sunni Muslim community from attending public religious services. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are designated by the Department of State as CPCs under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom.

There is a disturbing increase in anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment in a number of countries in the region, manifested as physical assaults and verbal harassment; hate speech over the internet; and vandalism of cemeteries, synagogues, mosques, community centers, and monuments. In January, Amedy Coulibaly killed four Jewish hostages and critically injured four others at a kosher supermarket in Paris. According to media reports citing survivors of the siege, Coulibaly was explicit about wishing to kill Jews. In several countries, openly anti-Semitic, nationalistic political parties have gained seats in parliaments, with government officials and elected members of parliaments at times responsible for anti-Semitic statements and acts. Acts of anti-Semitism persisted among far-right organizations; various groups continued to commemorate World War II fascist leaders. Political parties opposing Muslim immigration drew support.

Bans on Kosher/Halal slaughter exist in several European countries, while there are increasing calls for bans or restrictions on circumcision, particularly in the Nordic countries. Both circumcision and Kosher/Halal slaughter are religious practices for Jews and Muslims, as well as some other religious groups.

The Russian government uses its anti-extremism law to justify raids, arrests, and bans on religious literature of peaceful, “non-traditional” minority religious groups, including readers of Muslim theologian Said Nursi, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Scientologists, Falun Gong practitioners, and some Protestant groups.

Voluntary Repatriation

The international community continues to support efforts to create favorable conditions for the return of ethnic minorities to their homes in the Balkans. In June 2006, Serbian, Kosovo, and UN authorities signed the Protocol on Voluntary and Sustainable Return to Kosovo, which sought to improve the conditions for return by focusing on three elements: ensuring the safety of returnees, returning property to the displaced and rebuilding their houses, and creating an overall environment that sustains returns. There is still much work to be done in ensuring that those hoping to return have the means to do so.

PRM supported the return process through a grant to Danish Refugee Council in FY 2015 and to the International Organization of Migration in FY2016 that promoted sustainable return through income-generation activities including vocational training and the provision of agricultural inputs, as well as community development projects to facilitate inter-ethnic dialogue. International funding continues to facilitate and sustain the return and reintegration of displaced minorities from Kosovo. The Regional Housing program will allow thousands of returns to take place in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. The program will encourage both voluntary repatriation and local integration as durable solutions.

Local Integration

UNHCR has led efforts to create viable asylum systems and effective legal protections for refugees in the Balkans, the Russian Federation, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. However, ineffective implementation of these laws, combined with the history of national animosities and xenophobia throughout the region, often makes effective local integration difficult for ethnic minority refugees. In Azerbaijan, a majority of refugees lack legal status, despite being recognized by UNHCR and permitted by the government to stay in the country. As such, refugees do not have access to legal employment, making local integration in Azerbaijan extremely difficult. In Russia, difficulties in acquiring

citizenship remain for some former Soviet citizens who resided in Russia before 1992 and are, under Russian law, entitled to Russian citizenship. Members of groups such as Meskhetian Turks have been unable to obtain Russian citizenship and thus remain stateless.

In Russia, UNHCR focuses on quality-assurance measures to strengthen the national asylum system, including access to the asylum system at borders, and measures contributing to the Government's plans to bring its reception infrastructure and processes up to international standards. In Montenegro, the path to citizenship has been particularly slow for those displaced from Kosovo. The Regional Housing Program should provide an easier path to local integration for some of the most vulnerable, including members of Roma populations, among this group. The Government of Serbia is implementing local integration programs for refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia and the displaced persons from Kosovo.

Third-Country Resettlement

The United States continues to accept refugees from the region. The vast majority are members of religious minorities from former Soviet Union countries who are adjudicated under the reduced evidentiary standards of the Lautenberg Amendment. While Jews comprised an average of 85 percent of the applicant pool in the early 1990s, Evangelical Christians now make up over 90 percent of the applicant pool. Around 70 percent of the Lautenberg caseload is from Ukraine. Jewish immigration to Israel from the region continues under the United Israel Appeal Program.

In addition to Lautenberg cases, the United States also accepts small numbers of UNHCR referrals from Russia and Central Asian countries and approximately 500 UNHCR-referred individuals from Malta each year. In an effort to continue processing refugees trapped in DHS-inaccessible countries such as Iran, Eritrea, and Yemen, the United States transfers UNHCR-referred cases of Afghans, Somalis, and a variety of other African nationality refugees to UNHCR Emergency Transit Centers (ETCs) in Timisoara, Romania and Humenne, Slovakia for U.S. resettlement processing. Although limited by the number of bed space available (200 beds in Timisoara and 250 in Humenne), the USRAP makes steady use of the ETCs. (*Note: these refugees are not counted against the Europe and Central Asia ceiling, but against the region that includes the country of origin of each refugee.*)

FY 2016 U.S. Admissions

In FY 2016 the United States plans to admit an estimated 4,000 refugees from Europe and Central Asia, the majority of whom are Lautenberg religious minority cases. Applicants are being processed in Almaty, Baku, Bishkek, Dushanbe, Kyiv, Valletta, Minsk, Tbilisi, Moscow, Timisoara, and Humenne.

FY 2017 U.S. Resettlement Program

The proposed FY 2017 ceiling for refugees from Europe and Central Asia is 4,000 individuals. Priority 2 includes individuals from countries of the former Soviet Union who will be adjudicated under the reduced evidentiary standards of Lautenberg Amendment guidelines. Applications for the Lautenberg program have increased substantially since the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine.

Proposed FY 2017 Europe and Central Asia program to include arrivals from the following categories:

<i>Priority 1 Individual Referrals</i>	<i>90</i>
<i>Priority 2 Groups</i>	<i>3,900</i>
<i>Priority 3 Family Reunification</i>	<i><u>10</u></i>
<i>Total Proposed Ceiling</i>	<i>4,000</i>

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

In 2015, the number of refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs, and other persons of concern in Latin America and the Caribbean surpassed seven million. The ongoing conflict in Colombia generates the largest numbers of refugees and IDPs in the region, and the second largest world-wide. The Government of Colombia (GOC) reports 6.6 million IDPs as of February 2016. Despite an expanded state presence and improved security in cities and towns throughout Colombia, displacement continues. According to official government statistics, between January 2013 and August 2015, approximately 15,000 people were forcibly displaced per month - about 480,000 people in total. The main causes of displacement were confrontations between the GOC and illegal armed groups, including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), criminal gangs (BACRIM) and criminal narco-trafficking networks, as well as landmines, extortion, and forced recruitment of children into armed groups.

In surrounding countries, including Ecuador, Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Panama, there are over 400,000 Colombian asylum seekers and refugees and the number continues to rise. Ecuador has the highest number of recognized Colombian refugees and asylum seekers in Latin America. As of December 2015, the Government of Ecuador (GOE) had recognized over 62,000 refugees and UNHCR reports an additional 180,000 persons of concern. The asylum process in Ecuador is slow and difficult to access, while the approval rate is around six percent. The GOE administers the pre-admissibility step in addition to the refugee status determination (RSD) process, which creates additional delays. Asylum seekers pending RSD can wait several years for a decision. UNHCR highlights a challenging protection environment in Ecuador for refugees, citing delays in registration, revocations of refugee status, labor exploitation, xenophobia and discrimination. Other countries in the region, such as Costa Rica, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Panama, also have established asylum procedures, but the registration and determination procedures are often implemented ineffectively. UNHCR is working with these countries, including Ecuador, to improve their asylum processes.

In Panama, most of the 17,000 recognized refugees and over 18,000 persons of concern as of November 2015 were Colombians. After more than a decade of ineffective handling of the temporary humanitarian protection status holders (PTH) situation, Panama's Office for Assistance to Refugees (ONPAR) delivered permanent resident documentation to most PTH holders in March 2014. As of late 2015, in Costa Rica, there are 16,623 recognized refugees and 8,000 of persons of concern to UNHCR. The recognition rate for asylum applications increased from 7.5 percent in 2014 to almost 30 percent in 2015. Decisions in asylum cases in Costa Rica can take up to a year, though asylum seekers have the right to work while they are waiting for a decision. UNHCR reported in December 2015 that there are 5,000 recognized refugees in Venezuela, and UNHCR estimates there are more than 200,000 persons, mostly Colombians, live in a refugee-like situation in the country. As of mid-2014 in Brazil, there were almost 6,000 recognized refugees from 75 countries; the largest numbers are from Colombia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala face extreme violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, severe economic inequality and social exclusion, and widespread corruption and poverty, compelling many people to flee their homes each year. These factors, as well as the desire to reunify with family members residing in the United States and seek economic opportunities in the United States, contributed to an unprecedented number of unaccompanied children and families with young children arriving in the United States in 2014.

Religious Freedom

In Latin America and the Caribbean, religious freedom is widely recognized and supported by government and society, though there are cases of religious intolerance. In some isolated instances, Christian groups, mainly Evangelicals, Protestants, and Mormons have reported impediments or complications to their practice of religion, establishment of religious institutions, and importation of religious materials. In some areas, there is harassment of Muslims, anti-Muslim speech, and marginalization of Afro and indigenous religions. In Cuba, significant government restrictions remain in place.

Although the constitution protects religious freedom, the Government of Cuba continues to monitor aspects of religious life, including interference in church affairs, surveillance of religious institutions, and harassment of outspoken church leaders. The USRAP in Havana offers Cubans who have been persecuted on a number of grounds, including their religious beliefs, the opportunity for permanent resettlement in the United States.

Priests and other religious leaders in some parts of Mexico continued to be targeted and received extortion attempts, death threats, and intimidation, often from organized criminal groups. There are also reports of local leaders pressuring Protestants to convert through forced displacement, arbitrary detention, and destruction of property in some rural and indigenous communities.

Manifestations of anti-Semitism that occurred throughout the hemisphere at times appeared correlated to the unfolding transitions to democracy in other parts of the world. In Venezuela, anti-Semitism is a growing concern, including instances of anti-Semitism in the government-controlled media.

Voluntary Repatriation

Given the threats and violence in Colombia from illegal armed groups (non-state actors) and the lack of state presence to provide full protection in some areas, UNHCR has not been actively promoting repatriation of Colombian refugees.

Local Integration

The Governments of Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela have maintained policies that theoretically allow Colombians in need of protection to obtain asylum and integrate locally, although the processes involved are usually slow and cumbersome. The governments' capacity to review applications and confer refugee status remains limited. Even registered refugees with the right to work in these countries struggle to find stable employment or income

opportunities, competing with the large number of poor in host communities. Colombians seeking international protection face high levels of discrimination and xenophobia, and the ability to locally integrate is difficult. Furthermore, refugees do not live in camps, but rather the large majority live in urban areas. Some Colombian persons of concern (including refugees and asylum seekers) in Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama, and Venezuela continue to experience harassment by persons associated with armed Colombian groups operating in these countries. Security remains a major concern for the Government of Panama, and Panamanians often equate refugees with drug trafficking and crime.

The Department of State is currently supporting UNHCR's efforts to assist the Dominican Republic and other Caribbean countries in developing systems for conducting refugee status determinations for asylum seekers, including Haitians. UNHCR's office in the Dominican Republic and its continued presence in Haiti have contributed greatly to its ability to address the protection needs of refugees, asylum-seekers, and displaced and stateless persons in mixed migration flows throughout the region. Despite Dominican Republic restarting its refugee eligibility committee (CONARE) in 2012, the asylum process remains dysfunctional. We also remain concerned that individuals are at risk of statelessness in the Dominican Republic due to the September 2013 Constitutional Tribunal ruling.

Third Country and In-Country Resettlement

In the past, local integration had been the solution best suited to regional refugee problems in Latin America. In recent years, however, third-country resettlement has become an important alternative for those who face physical risks and have urgent protection needs. Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and the United States offer resettlement to at-risk Colombian refugees. Currently, the United States accepts referrals from UNHCR and embassies in the region and processes these cases principally in Ecuador, with occasional cases in Costa Rica and other countries throughout the region. Under the "Solidarity Resettlement Program," a component of the Mexico Plan of Action which sought regional solutions to the Colombian refugee issue, countries in the region including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay are working with UNHCR to resettle a modest number of Colombian refugees. The United States also facilitates the resettlement to third countries of persons interdicted by the U.S. Coast Guard in the Caribbean or who enter Guantanamo Naval Station directly and are found by DHS/USCIS to have a well-founded fear of persecution or to be more likely than not to face torture if repatriated to their country of origin. From 1996 to date, approximately 412 such protected persons have been resettled to 20 countries worldwide.

The U.S. government also operates an in-country refugee resettlement program in Cuba. The number of persons seeking refugee resettlement has decreased, and the backlog of cases pending review by the Department of State for access to the USRAP has been eliminated. The decrease in new applications reflects a shrinking pool of qualified applicants. The Refugee Section at the U.S. Embassy has not received any recent information regarding individuals who have been prevented by the Cuban government from traveling through the in-country refugee settlement program.

Cubans eligible to apply for admission to the United States through the in-country program include the following:

1. Former political prisoners;
2. Active members of persecuted religious minorities;
3. Human rights activists, long-standing members;
4. Forced labor conscripts (1965-68); and
5. Persons deprived of their professional credentials or subjected to other disproportionately harsh or discriminatory treatment resulting from their perceived or actual political or religious beliefs.

On December 1, 2014, PRM and DHS/USCIS launched the Central American Minors (CAM) program, an in-country refugee program in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras for unmarried children under 21 of certain lawfully present parents residing in the United States. If the second parent is resident in the country of origin with the child and is married to the parent who is resident in the United States, that parent can also be considered for resettlement, but would have to establish an independent refugee claim. The U.S. government established the program to provide a safe, legal, and orderly alternative to the dangerous journey that some children are currently undertaking to join their parents in the United States. To apply, an eligible parent who is lawfully present in the United States must complete the Affidavit of Relationship (AOR, Form DS-7699) with the assistance of a State Department-funded resettlement agency. Applicants found by DHS/USCIS to be at a risk or harm but not eligible for refugee resettlement are considered on a case-by-case basis for parole. Unlike refugee status, parole is temporary and does not confer any permanent legal immigration status or path to permanent legal immigration status in the United States.

On July 26, 2016 the White House announced the expansion of refugee processing and access to resettlement in the United States for vulnerable individuals from Central America, in partnership with UNHCR. The CAM program will expand to allow additional categories of applicants when these family members accompany a qualified child: sons and daughters of a U.S.-based lawfully

present parent who are 21 years or older and/or married; in-country biological parent of the qualified children; and caregivers of qualified children who are also related to the U.S.-based lawfully present parent.

DHS/USCIS and the State Department also continue to work on expansion of refugee processing in Central America beyond the CAM program. The Government of Costa Rica announced a protection transfer arrangement (PTA) with the UNHCR and IOM. Through UNHCR and IOM, the USG will pre-screen vulnerable Salvadoran, Honduran, and Guatemalan applicants and will transfer applicants most in need of immediate protection to Costa Rica, where they will undergo refugee processing before being interviewed by DHS/USCIS and considered for resettlement to the United States. For cases not requiring immediate transfer to Costa Rica, an in-country referral program will be established to interview certain cases for refugee protection.

FY 2016 U.S. Admissions

We anticipate admitting approximately 1,500 refugees from Latin America and the Caribbean during FY 2016, including Central American minors, Colombians, and Cubans. Historically, most Cuban admissions were former political prisoners and forced labor conscripts. The program was expanded in 1991 to include human rights activists, displaced professionals, and others with claims of persecution, which currently compose the majority of admissions.

FY 2017 U.S. Resettlement Program

The proposed 5,000 ceiling for Latin America and the Caribbean for FY 2017 comprises Cuban refugees eligible for the in-country Priority 2 program; Central American Minors eligible for the in-country Priority 2 program; UNHCR-referred Priority 1 Colombians and Central Americans; as well as a small number of Priority 3 family reunification cases.

Proposed FY 2017 Latin America program to include arrivals from the following categories:

<i>Priority 1 Individual Referrals</i>	<i>950</i>
<i>Priority 2 Groups</i>	<i>4,000</i>
<i>Priority 3 Family Reunification</i>	<i><u>50</u></i>
<i>Total Proposed Ceiling</i>	<i>5,000</i>

NEAR EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

The Near East/South Asia region remains host to more than 12 million refugees, primarily Palestinians, Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis, Somalis, Burmese, Bhutanese, Sri Lankans, and Tibetans. Countries hosting the largest populations of refugees are Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran, and Jordan. Few countries in the region are party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and/or its 1967 Protocol. Nonetheless, many host governments tolerate the presence of refugees within their borders.

UNHCR, UNRWA, ICRC, IOM, WFP, UNICEF, and other humanitarian organizations work with refugees in the region. Some countries have provided long-term protection and/or asylum, mainly to Tibetans, Bhutanese, Sri Lankans, Palestinians, Afghans, Iraqis, Somalis, Syrians, and a handful of other nationalities. Refugees identified by UNHCR for third-country resettlement include Iraqis in Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, and the Gulf States; Bhutanese in Nepal; Afghans in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Syria, and India; and Iranians in Turkey.

As of December 31, 2015, nearly 222,000 Iraqi refugees were registered with UNHCR in the region. IOM reports that more than 3.4 million Iraqis have been displaced since January 2014 by violence in Iraq. As of March 2016, there are nearly 250,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq, as well as approximately 30,000 refugees and asylum seekers of other origins (including Palestinians and Iranian Kurds). The U.S. government is providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced Iraqis and refugees from Iraq throughout the region through support to international and non-governmental organizations. U.S. funding seeks to ensure conflict-affected Iraqis receive shelter, water, sanitation, health care, protection, and education. Since the start of Fiscal Year 2014, the United States has provided nearly \$915 million in essential humanitarian assistance.

Intense fighting in Syria has caused massive displacement, both internally and to countries in the region. Inside Syria, 13.5 million Syrians require humanitarian assistance, and 6.5 million are internally displaced. Nearly 4.6 million Syrians are living in areas that are besieged or difficult to reach. Some 440,000 people, and perhaps many more, remain vulnerable due to continued combat between and among Syrian regime forces and allies of the Syrian government and various anti-regime armed groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Outside of Syria, neighboring countries are hosting 4.8 million refugees. Hospitals are filled to capacity, schools are running double shifts, the availability of water has decreased, and housing rents are rising in communities hosting Syrians. The crisis in Syria and its spillover effects have pushed the number of Lebanese living below the extreme poverty line (\$2.40 per

day) to 404,000. The number of poor Lebanese and refugees in Lebanon has risen by an estimated 110 percent since 2011. Meanwhile, Turkey has spent approximately \$10 billion to support refugees, through construction and services in high-quality camps and other support to non-camp communities. Jordan is also making significant outlays and will require \$8 billion between 2016 and 2018 to meet refugee needs and strengthen Jordanian communities.

The U.S. government is providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced Syrians and refugees from Syria across the region through support to international organizations, such as UNHCR, UNICEF, UNRWA, UNFPA, IOM, ICRC, and WFP, as well as through non-governmental organizations, which are providing critical assistance in virtually all sectors, including water and sanitation, shelter, education and medical care. The U.S. government, the single largest global donor, had provided nearly \$5.6 billion in critical humanitarian assistance since the start of the Syria crisis.

Despite the voluntary repatriation of over 5.8 million Afghan refugees since 2002, Pakistan and Iran continue to host, respectively, approximately 1.5 million and 950,000 registered Afghans, many of whom have resided in these countries for over three and a half decades. The maintenance of asylum and protection space for those refugees who cannot yet return to Afghanistan while continuing to support voluntary repatriation, is a top priority for the U.S. government and for UNHCR. In addition to Afghan refugees, some 2-3 million Afghans are believed to live and work in Pakistan and Iran as economic migrants without documentation. Over 11,000 Afghan refugees and asylum seekers are also registered with UNHCR in India. Identifying durable solutions remains an important component of UNHCR's strategy in India. Local integration in South Asia remains a difficult option due to opposition from most host countries.

Tens of thousands of ethnic Nepali Bhutanese were forced out of Bhutan in the early 1990s as a result of the Bhutanese government's policy of "one nation and one people" (also referred to as "Bhutanization"). Despite 17 rounds of formal negotiations between Bhutan and Nepal, and pressure from the United States and other governments to resolve the issue and secure the right of return for Bhutanese refugees, particularly humanitarian cases, to date none have been permitted to return. Due to concerted resettlement efforts commenced in late 2007 by the United States and other resettlement countries, over 102,000 Bhutanese refugees have departed after spending two decades in camps in eastern Nepal; of whom more than 86,000 have resettled in the United States. The U.S. government continues to press the Government of Bhutan to help resolve this protracted situation by accepting the return of eligible refugees who wish to voluntarily repatriate. Similarly, the U.S. government encourages the Government of Nepal to

allow the projected 10,000-12,000 refugees who will remain in the camps following the conclusion of third country resettlement to work, gain legal status, and access public education, health care, and other services.

Religious Freedom

Persecution of religious groups is common in many countries in the Near East and South Asia that are countries of origin for refugee populations entering the United States. State and local government responses to violence against members of religious groups, particularly Muslims and Christians, are often inadequate. Although many of these countries do not have Jewish populations, anti-Semitism is prevalent, and often espoused by governments or religious leaders.

In Afghanistan, religious freedom is limited due to constitutional contradictions, legislative ambiguity, and interpretations of Islamic law that punish apostasy and blasphemy.

In Pakistan, the penal code includes blasphemy laws that carry punishments ranging from imprisonment to the death penalty. Frequent abuses of these laws negatively affect religious minorities, both Muslims and non-Muslims. In 2014, 12 new cases were registered under the blasphemy law, and the courts sentenced at least three people to death, six people to life-imprisonment, and three people to two-year jail terms, and acquitted one person for committing blasphemy. The government has yet to carry out a death sentence for blasphemy. Nevertheless, at least 17 people are awaiting execution for blasphemy, and at least 20 others are serving life sentences.

In Sri Lanka, religious tensions continue to be a problem, and Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist communities often distrust one another. In 2014, under the previous government, local authorities failed to respond effectively to communal violence, including attacks on members of minority religious groups, and perpetrators were not brought to justice. In June 2014 at least three Muslims were killed and scores injured in clashes with hardline Buddhists in Aluthgama and Beruwalla. The incident occurred after the Bodu Bala Sena, a hardline violent ethnic Sinhala Buddhist organization with links to the previous government, held a large rally in the streets of Aluthgama. Non-governmental organizations alleged that senior and local government officials provided assistance to or, at a minimum, tacit support for the actions of societal groups targeting religious minorities.

In Bhutan, Buddhism is the state's "spiritual heritage," although in the southern areas many citizens openly practice Hinduism. There is subtle pressure on non-Buddhists to observe the traditional Buddhist values and some limitations on constructing non-Buddhist places of worship remain. Some societal pressures toward non-Buddhists are reflected in official and unofficial efforts to uphold the "spiritual heritage" (Buddhism) of the country.

In Iran, religious groups, including Sunni Muslims, Baha'is, Sufis, Jews, Zoroastrians, Yaresanis, and Christians, continue to face official discrimination, harassment, and arrest. Members of the Shia community who express religious views different from those of the government are also subject to harassment and intimidation. The government continues convictions and executions of dissidents, political reformists, and peaceful protesters on the charge of moharebeh (enmity against God), anti-Islamic propaganda, and other religion-related charges, which it often links to national security.

In Iraq, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) targeted many of its attacks and abuses on the basis of religious and ethnic identity. On March 17, 2016, Secretary Kerry announced that, in his judgment, ISIL is responsible for genocide against groups in areas under its control, including Yezidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims. He also said that ISIL is responsible for crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing directed at these same groups and in some cases also against Sunni Muslims, Kurds, and other minorities. Ongoing sectarian tensions and discrimination affect all of Iraq's religious and ethnic communities. As a result, some of these religious communities, along with their ancient languages and customs, are on the verge of disappearing.

In Syria, the Assad regime increased its targeting and surveillance of members of a variety of faith groups it deemed a threat, especially members of the country's Sunni majority. This occurred concurrently with the escalation of violent extremist activity targeted against religious minorities, including Christians, Druze, Alawites, Yezidis, and others as the civil war continues. Large-scale internal and external displacement of all sectors of the population is ongoing.

In Lebanon, the constitution requires the state to respect all religious groups and declares equality of rights and duties for all citizens without discrimination or preference, and stipulates that there be a balance of political power among the major religious groups. Sectarian violence, including attacks by ISIL, al-Nusra, and other extremist groups, increased significantly during 2015, straining relations among the country's 18 officially-recognized religious groups. Despite the rise in violence, political and religious leaders have been vocal in their opposition to violent extremism and in their support of peaceful coexistence across sectarian divides. Religious group identity remains a significant element of social

interaction and cultural expression, and places of worship continue to exist in relative peace and security. Relationships among individual members of different religious groups are generally amicable, with some exceptions.

In Turkey, some religious minority communities, including Alevis, face difficulties owning property, registering places of worship, and gaining exemptions from compulsory Sunni Islamic instruction. Faith-based conscientious objectors in Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan are sometimes arrested and prosecuted for failing to comply with laws mandating military service.

In some countries in the region, most notably Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Egypt, blasphemy and defamation of religion laws are used to restrict religious liberty, constrain the rights of religious minorities, and limit freedom of expression, and those accused face prison sentences and threats of violence. In most countries in the region, Sharia courts decide personal status cases, which generally forbid conversion by Muslims. Iran and Saudi Arabia are designated by the Department of State as CPCs under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom.

The USRAP provides resettlement access in various ways to refugees who suffer religious persecution. Nationals of any country, including CPCs, may be referred to the USRAP through a Priority 1 referral by UNHCR or a U.S. embassy for reasons of religious persecution. Under the Lautenberg-Specter Amendment, Iranian religious minorities designated as Priority 2 category members are considered under a reduced evidentiary standard for establishing a well-founded fear of persecution.

Voluntary Repatriation

Since 2002, over 5.8 million Afghan refugees have returned to Afghanistan, mostly from Pakistan and Iran. Over 4.7 million have been assisted by UNHCR in the largest repatriation operation in UNHCR's history. Despite a slight increase in 2015 due to pressures placed on refugees in Pakistan, the era of mass returns has largely ended. Returned refugees represent roughly 20 percent of Afghanistan's total population and overwhelm the country's capacity to absorb them.

It is unlikely that all of the remaining 2.5 million registered Afghans in Pakistan and Iran will repatriate in the near future. UNHCR and IOM report the continuing migration of Afghans in both directions across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border is part of a larger process of economic and social migration that has been occurring for centuries. UNHCR is working with the Governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran and the international community to develop

policies and programs to sustain voluntary returns. They are also working to better manage the residual Afghan population in Pakistan by working toward longer-term protection and migration solutions. IOM is seeking a greater role in border management and in developing regional mechanisms for economic migration that would bolster protection for Afghans. The Government of Afghanistan is working to increase its capacity in helping returnees fold back into Afghan economic and social structures and at the same time prioritizes continued protection for Afghan citizens still seeking refuge abroad. UNHCR, together with the Governments of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, continue to work toward implementing UNHCR's *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries (SSAR)*. The SSAR provides for the orderly, voluntary return of Afghan refugees and emphasizes the need to reintegrate returned refugees into their communities fully.

Stabilizing the displaced Afghan population – e.g., reintegrating returning refugees and IDPs into Afghan society and preserving asylum space for refugees in neighboring countries – is critical to regional stability, as is addressing irregular migration. The Afghan government has also adopted a national IDP policy which seeks to address protection, assistance, and durable solutions for displaced populations within its borders. With assistance from UNHCR and others, the Afghan government began implementing the IDP policy in 2015.

The United States continues to work with other interested governments in urging the Government of Bhutan to allow for the voluntary repatriation of Bhutanese refugees to Bhutan under acceptable terms and conditions. With the end of the conflict in Sri Lanka in 2009, nearly 13,000 refugees have returned with UNHCR assistance. However, the number of Tamils seeking to return from India has decreased. So far in 2016, UNHCR assisted in the voluntary return of 163 Tamil refugees to Sri Lanka.

Local Integration

The SSAR promotes enhancing support for refugee-hosting communities and providing some alternative stay arrangements for refugees in Afghanistan and Iran. While some progress is being made, few countries in the region offer local integration to refugees. In July 2013, the Government of Pakistan endorsed the policies found in the *National Policy on Management and Repatriation of Afghan Refugees beyond 30th June, 2013*. At the same meeting, the Cabinet extended the validity of Afghan Proof of Registration cards and the Tripartite Agreement (among the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan and UNHCR) until December 31, 2015. As part of the Pakistan implementation of the SSAR and in partnership with the Government of Pakistan and UN agencies, UNHCR launched the Refugee-Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) initiative in 2009. This program

is widely regarded as a success in addressing Afghan refugee and Pakistani host community needs by rehabilitating areas that have been adversely affected by the presence of Afghan refugee communities over the past 30 years. The United States will continue to work with UNHCR and the Government of Pakistan to preserve asylum space and promote alternative stay arrangements. However, at present, local integration is not an option for most of the Afghan refugees.

Local integration is currently not an option for Iraqi refugees who settled in the region, though Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon have preserved first asylum and protection space for Iraqi refugees. Syria hosted approximately 22,000 UNHCR-registered Iraqi refugees as of December 31, 2015. Jordan and Lebanon host approximate 53,000 and 17,000 Iraqi refugees respectively. Both countries closely manage their borders, requiring Iraqis to obtain visas before entering, which effectively limits the number of Iraqis able to seek asylum as not all are able to secure visas.

Iraqis in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan are not legally defined as refugees, but rather as guests or, in the case of Jordan, asylum seekers. These governments allow UNHCR to register Iraqis. With help from the international community, the governments of Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan have allowed Iraqi students to enroll in public schools, though they are often required to pay fees, which may be prohibitively expensive for refugees without international assistance, and enrollment numbers are low. Similarly Iraqi refugees in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan have access to the public health care systems, but are required to pay fees to access services. Refugees in Lebanon and Syria are not legally allowed to work, though many do so in the grey economy. Although Iraqis, like all foreigners in Jordan, can work legally in several labor sectors, few have obtained the necessary work permits because these require possession of residency permits, which the GOJ is not issuing to Iraqis.

With the incredible rise in the number of displaced since January 2014 and the continuing violence throughout Iraq, many Iraqi IDPs will not be able to return to their home communities in the near future. While it is still too soon to seek local integration support, it is important for displaced Iraqis to be able to access services in their areas of displacement.

While Turkey ratified the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and acceded to its 1967 Protocol, the Turkish government acceded to the Protocol with a geographic limitation acknowledging refugees only from Europe. While nearly all asylum seekers are thus not considered refugees under Turkish law, the Turkish government grants temporary refuge and temporary local integration possibilities to refugees recognized by UNHCR usually pending their referral to a potential resettlement country. As of March 2016, there were over 250,000 refugees, as well

as those pre-registered and registered with UNHCR Turkey, the majority from Iraq and Afghanistan. UNHCR-recognized refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey are assigned to one of 64 satellite cities. Provincial governments are responsible for meeting refugees' basic needs, including by providing access to employment, healthcare, and education, although support varies from one location to another. The 2.7 million Syrians that Turkey hosts are not counted under these regulations as they are afforded temporary protection status instead of conditional refugee status.

Turkey's "Foreigners and International Protection Law" regulates the entry, exit, and the stay of migrants in the country, along with the scope of international protection for those who seek asylum in Turkey. The law went into full implementation on April 11, 2014, creating a new entity within the Ministry of Interior, the Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM). DGMM is responsible for implementing most aspects of the law, including temporary protection registration and exit permit issuance. DGMM continues to build up staff size and capacity, expand its regional scope, and refine roles and responsibilities with other Turkish agencies in emergency response for refugees. In January 2015, DGMM passed a regulation allowing Syrian refugees to work officially. Employers must apply to the Ministry of Labor for work permits and there are restrictions such as refugees must work in the province where they are registered, must have lived in Turkey for more than six months, and company staff cannot be more than 10 percent Syrian. The effect of these restrictions is that very few Syrian refugees are working legally in Turkey.

Despite the increasing number of asylum seekers and refugees, India does not have a clear national policy for the treatment of refugees, and UNHCR has a limited mandate in the country. India permits UNHCR to assist asylum seekers and urban refugees in New Delhi and other cities, primarily Burmese, Afghans, and Somalis. UNHCR-recognized asylum seekers and urban refugees are eligible to apply for long-term visas that, if granted, are renewable for five years, provide work authorization and access to higher education and public services. India recognizes and aids certain groups, including Sri Lankan refugees in the 112 camps in Tamil Nadu and Tibetan refugees in the 39 settlements and other urban areas throughout the country. The Government of India provides support and benefits to registered Tibetan and Sri Lankan refugees. It also grants work authorization and other rights to documented Tibetans. However, Sri Lankan refugees in India do not receive work authorization from the central government but have authorization from the state government to work in the state of Tamil Nadu.

Third-Country Resettlement

The USRAP anticipates the continued large-scale processing of Syrians and Iraqis, and, to a lesser extent, Bhutanese, Afghans and Iranians, during FY 2017.

In the Near East, the United States recognizes that the possibility of third-country resettlement must be available to the most vulnerable Iraqi and Syrian refugees, and has processing facilities in Amman, Baghdad, Beirut, Cairo, Erbil, and Istanbul. The U.S. Embassy in Syria is shuttered and interviews are not currently taking place in Damascus.

In late 2013, UNHCR announced its intention to refer 30,000 Syrian refugees for resettlement in third countries by the end of 2014 and, as noted above, referred nearly 36,000 in 2015. UNHCR is on track to meet its goal of referring up to 100,000 additional Syrian refugees by the end of 2016. The United States is playing a significant role in this effort. The majority of Syrian referrals will be processed in Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt, and to a lesser extent in Lebanon and Erbil, the Kurdistan region of Iraq, and elsewhere. As of late June 2016, UNHCR had referred over 48,000 Syrians for U.S. resettlement consideration. In FY 2015, the United States admitted 1,682 Syrian refugees and aims to admit at least 10,000 in FY 2016. With UNHCR's decision to significantly increase Syrian referrals for resettlement, the United States is ramping up processing operations in Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt in FY 2017.

The United States has been resettling Iraqis in large numbers since 2007. While many Iraqis gain access to the USRAP via a referral from UNHCR, direct access to the USRAP for Iraqis with close U.S. affiliations is also available in a limited number of countries in the region. The Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act, enacted January 28, 2008, created categories of Iraqis who are eligible for direct access (Priority 2) to the USRAP, both inside and outside Iraq. Individuals who meet the following criteria may seek direct access to USRAP in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates:

1. Iraqis who work/worked on a full-time basis as interpreters/translators for the U.S. Government, MNF-I in Iraq, or U.S. Forces-Iraq;
2. Iraqis who are/were employed by the U.S. Government in Iraq;
3. Iraqis who are/were employees of an organization or entity closely associated with the U.S. mission in Iraq that has received U.S. Government funding through an official and documented contract, award, grant or cooperative agreement;

4. Iraqis who are/were employed in Iraq by a U.S.-based media organization or non-governmental organization; and
5. Spouses, sons, daughters, parents, and siblings of individuals described in the four categories above, or of an individual eligible for a Special Immigrant Visa as a result of his/her employment by or on behalf of the U.S. Government in Iraq, including if the individual is no longer alive, provided that the relationship is verified.

In addition to the above, the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act provides direct access to the USRAP to Iraqis who have close family members in the United States, which has been defined as beneficiaries of approved I-130 Petition for Alien Relative petitions, as well as to their derivatives.

Refugee processing in Iraq remains a high priority for the United States, as it directly benefits Iraqis associated with U.S. efforts in Iraq. Although security and logistical challenges associated with operating in Iraq limit in-country processing capacity, both the RSC and DHS/USCIS interviews in Baghdad in mid-2015.

In February 2016, direct access (Priority 2) to the USRAP was extended to Syrian beneficiaries of approved I-130 Petition for Alien Relatives and their derivatives. Processing is available in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Since the United States is unable to conduct refugee resettlement directly from Iran, we partner with the Government of Austria to allow for certain Iranian religious minority applicants (Baha'is, Zoroastrians, Jews, Mandaeans, and Christians) to travel from Iran to Austria for their U.S. resettlement processing. These refugees are considered under a reduced evidentiary standard for establishing a well-founded fear of persecution granted by the Lautenberg-Specter Amendment. The Amendment was reauthorized December, 18 2015, allowing new applications to be filed and adjudicated under the reduced evidentiary guidelines. In Turkey, the United States also processes Iranian religious minorities (primarily Baha'i) through special procedures involving a "fast-track" refugee status determination and referral by UNHCR.

Resettlement processing for Bhutanese refugees in Nepal is continuing smoothly and the United States remains committed to considering for resettlement all Bhutanese refugees who expressed interest to UNHCR by June 30, 2014. As of April 2016, UNHCR had referred over 115,000 Bhutanese refugees for resettlement to eight countries and more than 102,000 of these Bhutanese refugees have been resettled to these countries – over 86,000 resettled in the United States – since late 2007. Processing of Bhutanese refugees who have declared interest in resettlement will conclude within two years.

In India, UNHCR refers some 400 individuals per year, with priority given to those it deems most vulnerable. The majority of referrals are Burmese. UNHCR also refers a very limited number of refugees out of Sri Lanka, mostly Pakistanis. We continue to explore modalities for processing vulnerable Tibetan refugees in the region.

FY 2016 U.S. Admissions

We estimate the admission of approximately 38,000 refugees from the region in FY16. These will include up to 15,000 Iraqis, 13,000 Syrians, 6,000 Bhutanese, 4,000 Iranians, and approximately 500 Afghans, including Afghan refugees in Iran processed through UNHCR Emergency Transit Centers in Slovakia and Romania.

FY 2017 U.S. Resettlement Program

The proposed regional ceiling for refugees from the Near East and South Asia for FY 2017 is 40,000, including vulnerable Syrians, Iraqis, Bhutanese, Iranians, Pakistanis, and Afghans. We expect Priority 1 UNHCR referrals for all of the aforementioned nationalities, including individuals from various and diverse religious and ethnic groups in the region, such as Assyrians, Mandeans, Iranian Kurds, Syrian Kurds, and Ahmadi Muslims. Many Iraqis, Syrians, and Iranians will also access the USRAP through specific Priority 2 programs.

Proposed FY 2017 Near East/ South Asia program to include arrivals from the following categories:

<i>Priority 1 Individual Referrals</i>	<i>19,000</i>
<i>Priority 2 Groups</i>	<i>20,900</i>
<i>Priority 3 Family Reunification</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Total Proposed Ceiling</i>	<i>40,000</i>

DOMESTIC IMPACT OF REFUGEE ADMISSIONS

In FY 2015, the USRAP admitted 69,933 refugees from 59 countries. More than half were originally from either Burma or Iraq. (See Table III.)

The demographic characteristics of refugee arrivals from the 20 largest source countries (representing close to 100 percent of total arrivals) in FY 2015 illustrate the variation among refugee groups. The median age of all FY 2015 arrivals was 25 years and ranged from 20 years for arrivals from Burundi, Central African Republic, Dem. Republic of Congo, and Somalia to 37 years of age for arrivals from Cuba and Iran. In FY 2015, 47.68 percent of all arriving refugees were female and 52.33 percent of all arriving refugees were male. Males predominated among refugees from Palestine (57.6 percent), Burundi (55.3 percent), and Pakistan (54.1 percent). (See Table IV.)

Of the total arrivals in FY 2015, some 11.3 percent were under the age of five, 28.2 percent were of school age, 61.6 percent were of working age, and 2.7 percent were of retirement age. (See Table V.) Considerable variation among refugee groups can be seen among specific age categories. Refugees under the age of five ranged from a high of 15.5 percent among Burma arrivals to a low of 2.2 percent of those from Iran. The number of school-aged children (from five to 17 years of age) varied from a high of over 47.4 percent of arrivals from Rwanda to a low of 11.7 percent of those from Iran. The number of working-aged refugees (16 to 64 years of age) varied from a high of 78.2 percent of those from Iran to a low of 50.5 percent of individuals from Burundi. Retirement-aged refugees (65 years or older) ranged from a high of 10.5 percent of arrivals from Iran to a low of less than one percent of those from Pakistan.

During FY 2015, 61 percent of all arriving refugees resettled in 12 states. The majority were placed in Texas (10.7 percent), followed by California (8.2 percent), New York (5.8 percent), Arizona (4.5 percent), Michigan (4.3 percent), and Ohio (4.3 percent). The states of Georgia (4.1 percent), Pennsylvania (4 percent), Illinois (3.8 percent), Washington (3.8 percent), Florida (3.5 percent), and North Carolina (3.5 percent) also were in the top twelve states where refugees were resettled. (See Table VI.)

TABLE III
Refugee Arrivals By Country of Origin
Fiscal Year 2015

Country of Origin	Arrival Number	% of Total
Afghanistan	910	1.30%
Angola	5	0.01%
Bangladesh	3	0.00%
Bhutan	5,775	8.26%
Burma	18,386	26.30%
Burundi	1,186	1.70%
Cameroon	8	0.01%
Central African Republic	270	0.39%
Chad	16	0.02%
China	30	0.04%
Colombia	521	0.74%
Congo	52	0.07%
Cuba	1,527	2.18%
Dem. Rep. Congo	7,876	11.26%
Djibouti	2	0.00%
Ecuador	1	0.00%
Egypt	13	0.02%
Equatorial Guinea	2	0.00%
Eritrea	1,596	2.28%
Ethiopia	626	0.90%
Former Soviet Union*	2,362	3.38%
Gambia	3	0.00%
Guinea	3	0.00%
India	1	0.00%
Indonesia	3	0.00%
Iran	3,109	4.45%
Iraq	12,676	18.13%

Ivory Coast	28	0.04%
Jamaica	1	0.00%
Jordan	2	0.00%
Kenya	3	0.00%
Korea, North	15	0.02%
Kuwait	4	0.01%
Lebanon	3	0.00%
Liberia	12	0.02%
Mali	4	0.01%
Nambia	1	0.00%
Nepal	26	0.04%
Netherlands	1	0.00%
Nigeria	4	0.01%
Pakistan	159	0.23%
Palestine	99	0.14%
Rep. of South Sudan	79	0.11%
Rwanda	173	0.25%
Saudi Arabia	3	0.00%
Senegal	4	0.01%
Sierra Leone	6	0.01%
Somalia	8,858	12.67%
South Africa	2	0.00%
Sri Lanka (Ceylon)	89	0.13%
Sudan	1,578	2.26%
Syria	1,682	2.41%
Togo	1	0.00%
Tunisia	7	0.01%
Turkey	2	0.00%
Uganda	67	0.10%
Vietnam	35	0.05%
Yemen	16	0.02%

Zimbabwe	7	0.01%
TOTAL	69,933	100.00%

Source: Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Refugee Processing Center

TABLE IV

Median Age and Gender of Refugee Arrivals, Fiscal Year 2015

Rank (# of Arrivals)	Country of Origin	Refugees Admitted	Median Age	% Females	% Males
1	Burma	18,386	23	44.71%	55.28%
2	Iraq	12,676	26	47.01%	52.99%
3	Somalia	8,858	20	49.36%	50.63%
4	Dem. Rep. Congo	7,876	20	50.47%	49.53%
5	Bhutan	5,775	29	50.35%	49.64%
6	Iran	3,109	37	50.56%	49.43%
7	Former Soviet Union*	2,362	28	50.08%	49.91%
8	Syria	1,682	21	47.44%	52.55%
9	Eritrea	1,596	21	47.99%	52.00%
10	Sudan	1,578	22	47.08%	52.91%
11	Cuba	1,527	37	46.95%	53.04%
12	Burundi	1,186	20	46.45%	53.54%
13	Afghanistan	910	23	48.79%	51.20%
14	Ethiopia	626	23	46.80%	53.19%
15	Colombia	521	24	51.24%	48.75%
16	Central African Republic	270	20	48.14%	51.85%
17	Rwanda	173	22	48.55%	51.44%
18	Pakistan	159	24	45.91%	54.08%
19	Palestine	99	28	42.42%	57.57%
20	Sri Lanka (Ceylon)	89	27	47.19%	52.80%
21	All Other Countries	475	26	42.10%	57.68%
TOTAL		69,933	25	47.68%	52.33%

Source: Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Refugee Processing Center

TABLE V

Select Age Categories of Refugee Arrivals, Fiscal Year 2015

Rank (# of Arrivals)	Country of Origin	Under 5 Yrs	School Age (5-17)	Working Age (16-64)	Retirement Age (=or > 65)
1	Burma	15.55%	23.74%	62.48%	1.24%
2	Iraq	10.83%	25.64%	62.64%	3.62%
3	Somalia	12.57%	35.36%	55.59%	0.96%
4	Dem. Rep. Congo	10.15%	40.50%	53.82%	1.32%
5	Bhutan	7.87%	22.21%	68.65%	5.00%
6	Iran	2.18%	11.70%	78.22%	10.51%
7	Former Soviet Union*	9.44%	26.50%	62.23%	5.08%
8	Syria	14.44%	37.21%	51.42%	1.36%
9	Eritrea	7.83%	36.71%	62.53%	0.43%
10	Sudan	11.21%	35.80%	56.08%	1.07%
11	Cuba	3.99%	18.46%	70.92%	10.15%
12	Burundi	13.65%	39.29%	50.50%	1.51%
13	Afghanistan	5.49%	34.83%	66.37%	1.20%
14	Ethiopia	13.09%	23.00%	66.29%	0.79%
15	Colombia	7.29%	30.13%	66.41%	0.76%
16	Central African Republic	12.22%	38.88%	53.33%	1.11%
17	Rwanda	5.20%	47.39%	58.96%	0.57%
18	Pakistan	8.80%	27.04%	66.03%	0.00%
19	Palestine	4.04%	30.30%	65.65%	4.04%
20	Sri Lanka (Ceylon)	7.86%	23.59%	67.41%	3.37%
21	All Other Countries	6.52%	25.26%	72.63%	0.21%
TOTAL		11.34%	28.25%	61.60%	2.67%

NOTE: Totals may exceed 100 percent due to overlapping age categories.

Source: Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Refugee Processing Center

TABLE VI**Refugee Arrivals By State of Initial Resettlement, Fiscal Year 2015**

STATE	Refugee Arrivals	Amerasian Arrivals	Total Arrivals	% of Total Arrivals to U.S.
Alabama	105	0	105	0.15%
Alaska	146	0	146	0.21%
Arizona	3,133	0	3,133	4.48%
Arkansas	13	0	13	0.02%
California	5,718	0	5,718	8.18%
Colorado	1,730	0	1,730	2.47%
Connecticut	519	0	519	0.74%
Delaware	9	0	9	0.01%
District of Columbia	5	0	5	0.01%
Florida	2,478	2	2,480	3.55%
Georgia	2,889	0	2,889	4.13%
Hawaii	7	0	7	0.01%
Idaho	935	0	935	1.34%
Illinois	2,658	0	2,658	3.80%
Indiana	1,793	0	1,793	2.56%
Iowa	783	4	787	1.13%
Kansas	741	0	741	1.06%
Kentucky	1,990	0	1,990	2.85%
Louisiana	135	0	135	0.19%
Maine	425	0	425	0.61%
Maryland	1,508	0	1,508	2.16%
Massachusetts	1,688	0	1,688	2.41%
Michigan	3,012	0	3,012	4.31%
Minnesota	2,288	3	2,291	3.28%
Mississippi	15	0	15	0.02%
Missouri	1,431	0	1,431	2.05%
Nebraska	1,200	0	1,200	1.72%
Nevada	610	0	610	0.87%
New Hampshire	446	0	446	0.64%
New Jersey	314	0	314	0.45%

STATE	Refugee Arrivals	Amerasian Arrivals	Total Arrivals	% of Total Arrivals to U.S.
New Mexico	207	0	207	0.30%
New York	4,052	0	4,052	5.79%
North Carolina	2,475	0	2,475	3.54%
North Dakota	497	0	497	0.71%
Ohio	2,989	0	2,989	4.27%
Oklahoma	479	0	479	0.68%
Oregon	1,029	0	1,029	1.47%
Pennsylvania	2,764	0	2,764	3.95%
Rhode Island	185	0	185	0.26%
South Carolina	226	0	226	0.32%
South Dakota	484	0	484	0.69%
Tennessee	1,530	0	1,530	2.19%
Texas	7,479	0	7,479	10.69%
Utah	1,109	0	1,109	1.59%
Vermont	312	0	312	0.45%
Virginia	1,312	0	1,312	1.88%
Washington	2,621	4	2,625	3.75%
West Virginia	31	0	31	0.04%
Wisconsin	1,415	0	1,415	2.02%
Total	69,920	13	69,933	100.00%

Note: Arrival figures do not reflect secondary migration.

Source: Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Refugee Processing Center

TABLE VII

**ESTIMATED AVAILABLE FUNDING FOR REFUGEE PROCESSING AND RESETTLEMENT
FY 2016 AND FY 2017 (\$ MILLIONS)**

AGENCY	ESTIMATED FY 2016 AVAILABILITY (BY DEPARTMENT)	ESTIMATED FY 2017 AVAILABILITY(BY DEPARTMENT)
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY <i>United States Citizenship and Immigration Services</i>		
Refugee Processing ¹	\$50.0	\$67.8
DEPARTMENT OF STATE <i>Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration</i>		
Refugee Admissions ^{2,3}	\$656.6	\$634.5
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES <i>Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement</i>		
Refugee Resettlement ⁴	\$720.9	\$841.9
ESTIMATED TOTAL AVAILABILITIES	\$1,427.5	\$1,544.2

¹ FY 2016: Includes cost factors to reflect Headquarters facilities rent related to the refugee resettlement program, projected staffing enhancements, and following-to-join refugee processing, in addition to certain ICASS costs.

² FY 2016: Includes FY 2016 Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) appropriation of \$462.7 million, \$70 million in Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) funding, \$44.5 million in PRM carryover from FY 2015, \$64.4 million in projected IOM loan collections/carryover, and an estimate of \$15 million in prior year MRA recoveries. A portion of these funds will be carried forward into FY 2017.

³ FY 2017: Includes FY 2017 MRA budget request of \$567.5 million, \$61 million in projected IOM loan collections/carryover, and an estimate of \$6 million in prior year MRA recoveries. Additional funds carried forward from FY 2016 will be available in FY 2017.

⁴ FY 2016 and FY 2017: HHS's Office of Refugee Resettlement's (ORR) refugee benefits and services are also provided to asylees, Cuban and Haitian entrants, certain Amerasians from Vietnam, victims of a severe form of trafficking who have received certification or eligibility letters from ORR, and certain family members who are accompanying or following to join victims of severe forms of trafficking, and some victims of torture, as well as Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrants and their spouses and unmarried children under the age of 21. The estimated funding for these groups is included here. However, none of these additional groups is included in the refugee admissions ceiling except Amerasians. This category does not include costs associated with the Unaccompanied Children's Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income programs, or the Victims of Trafficking. These estimates do not include any prior year carryover funding. The estimated FY 2017 figures above reflect the President's FY 2017 Budget request.

TABLE VIII
UNHCR Resettlement Statistics by Resettlement Country CY 2015 Admissions

RESETTLEMENT COUNTRY	TOTAL	PERCENT OF TOTAL RESETTLED
United States	52,583	64.21%
Canada	10,236	12.50%
Australia	5,211	6.36%
Norway	2,220	2.71%
Germany	2,097	2.56%
Sweden	1,808	2.21%
United Kingdom	1,768	2.16%
Finland	964	1.18%
New Zealand	756	.92%
France	700	.85%
Switzerland	664	.81%
Austria	642	.78%
Denmark	486	.60%
Albania	483	.59%
Netherlands	428	.52%
Belgium	276	.34%
Ireland	178	.22%
Italy	96	.12%
Spain	92	.11%
Luxembourg	49	.06%
Rep. of Korea	42	.05%
Portugal	39	.05%
Japan	19	.02%
Liechtenstein	17	.02%
Belarus	14	.02%

Iceland	13	.02%
Brazil	6	.01%
Hungary	2	.00%
Romania	2	.00%
Poland	2	.00%
TOTAL	81,893	100.00%

Resettlement country figures (submissions and departures) may not match UNHCR reported figures as resettlement country figures may include submissions received outside of UNHCR auspices. UNHCR figures may also include cases in which UNHCR did not submit but assisted, i.e. obtaining exit permits for humanitarian admissions or family reunion.