

U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)

Syrian Processing – Frequently Asked Questions, 2016

Q. Who is eligible for USRAP consideration?

A. In general, a refugee is a person who has crossed an international border and is unwilling or unable to return home because of past persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Individuals who have left Syria and believe they have been persecuted or have a well-founded fear of persecution should approach the nearest United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office for protection and assistance. UNHCR offices register asylum seekers and may refer for third-country resettlement consideration, including to the United States, those who are found to be particularly vulnerable and in need of resettlement.

For more information on UNHCR standards and criteria for determining resettlement as the appropriate solution for refugees, refer to the UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, available online at <http://www.unhcr.org/4a2ccf4c6.html>.

Q. Are there any ways to apply to the USRAP if I am not referred by UNHCR?

A. Syrian beneficiaries of approved I-130 immigrant visa petitions have the option to apply directly to the USRAP in certain locations throughout the Middle East and North Africa. If you are a Syrian beneficiary of an approved I-130 petition, you have received or will receive a letter from the Department of State, via your petitioner, with instructions for how to apply through this program. Processing for this program is available in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. Processing is not available in Syria, Turkey, Canada, Europe, Asia or any other location not listed above.

For more information about this option, please consult the frequently asked questions document titled Direct Access Program for Iraqi and Syrian Beneficiaries of I-130 Petitions available at <http://www.wrapsnet.org/SIVIraqiP2/tabid/290/Default.aspx>.

Additionally, Syrians are eligible for Priority-3 (P-3) access to USRAP if they are outside of Syria and have immediate family members in the United States who initially entered as refugees or were granted asylum. The following relatives 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. To initiate an application through this program, the U.S.-based family member should contact his/her resettlement agency (RA) for assistance in filing an Affidavit of Relationship on behalf of his/her Syrian relatives overseas.

Please note that while a UNHCR referral is not required to access the USRAP in Lebanon, Government of Lebanon exit permit procedures do necessitate individuals to be registered with UNHCR.

Q. What if I am a Syrian still in Syria?

A. Due to the ongoing conflict in Syria, we are not currently able to conduct any stage of refugee processing in Syria. Syrian beneficiaries of approved I-130 petitions may seek access to the Priority-2 Direct Access Program in Jordan, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, Qatar, Iraq, Israel, Bahrain, Oman, Morocco, and Algeria. This program provides an avenue for Syrian beneficiaries of form I-130 Petition for Alien Relative to apply for refugee resettlement in the United States through the U.S Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)

Q. What if I am a Syrian citizen currently in the United States and am unable to return home?

A. Syrians currently in the United States who are not able to return to Syria because they have been persecuted or fear they will be persecuted on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion may apply for asylum with the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Information on the process of applying for asylum in the United States can be found at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' website at <http://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum/asylum>.

Syrians in the United States may also be eligible for Temporary Protected Status (TPS). More information about TPS is available at <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status>.

Q. Do I need a passport to be processed for admission to the U.S. as a refugee?

A. Individuals who are approved by the United States as refugees do not need a passport to enter the United States. Travel documents which are accepted for entry in the United States are prepared for the refugee and provided at the time of travel. However, some countries of first asylum in the region do require passports for entry.

Q. I already have a refugee case with the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. What is the general contact information for my Resettlement Support Center (RSC)?

A. If you reside anywhere in the Middle East or North Africa, excluding Lebanon, please contact RSC MENA, which is operated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), at IC@iom.int.

If you reside in Lebanon or Turkey, please contact RSC TuME, which is operated by the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), at info.rsc@icmc.net.

Q. What if I have family members in the United States?

A. A number of avenues are available for family reunification, depending on the immigration status of your relative in the United States.

U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents may file a Form I-130 Petition for Alien Relative. U.S. citizens may file for spouses, children (regardless of age or marital status), siblings, and parents. Lawful permanent residents (LPRs) may file for spouses, unmarried children under 21, and unmarried adult children. For additional information, please visit <https://www.uscis.gov/i-130>.

Syrians who were admitted to the United States as a principal refugee (RE-1) or who were granted asylum status as a principle asylee (AS-1) may also file a Form I-730 Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition (also known as a follow-to-join petition or Visa 92/Visa 93) for spouses and unmarried children under the age of 21. This petition must be filed with USCIS within two years of arrival in the United States. For additional information, please visit <http://www.uscis.gov/i-730>.

Syrians who were resettled to the U.S. through the USRAP or who were granted asylum in the U.S. may also file an affidavit of relationship (AOR) for their spouses, parents, and unmarried children under the age of 21 who are outside of their country of origin to apply for refugee resettlement through the USRAP. This form must be submitted to the Department of State through a resettlement agency affiliate in the refugee's geographic area. A directory of affiliates can be found at <http://snip.state.gov/cdr>.

Q. If I am referred to the USRAP, how long does resettlement processing take?

A. Resettlement is a multi-step process, and a referral to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) or Priority-2 or Priority-3 direct-access application (if eligible) is the very first step. Upon receiving a referral or application and determining that an individual is eligible for consideration, the U.S. Department of State instructs its resettlement support center (RSC), an entity funded by the State Department, to prepare a case file. The next step is for the RSC to conduct a pre-screening interview. This process includes taking photos and fingerprints, collecting information, and initiating security checks. All applicants are then interviewed by an immigration officer from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). USCIS makes the final decision regarding every applicant's eligibility for resettlement. If approved for refugee status, applicants undergo a medical exam and receive cultural orientation. An NGO in the United States agrees to be the refugee's sponsor. Once all security and medical checks are complete, approved applicants are booked on a flight to the United States by the International Organization for Migration, and given a loan to cover the cost of their travel. The time it takes to complete all the steps varies, but the worldwide average processing time is about 18 to 24 months from the time of referral or application until arrival in the United States. Every case is different, and waiting times vary.

Q. If I am referred by UNHCR or submit a direct application, am I guaranteed resettlement?

A. No. The decision to admit an applicant to the United States as a refugee is made by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) following an in-person interview with an officer from DHS's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and is based on the particular merits of the case. A referral or application by an eligible individual to the USRAP provides access to an interview with DHS/USCIS but does not guarantee admission to the United States.

Q. If I am granted refugee status, how long can I stay in the U.S.?

A. Resettlement through the USRAP is permanent. Those who are found to be refugees and admissible will be relocated to the United States to start new lives. They will be provided short-term assistance with housing, medical appointments, and other services upon arrival, but will be expected to seek employment and become fully self-sufficient as soon as possible. Eligible refugees must apply to adjust status to that of lawful permanent resident (LPR) after one year and may apply for U.S. citizenship after five years.

Q. What kind of benefits will I get if I become a refugee?

A. Individuals who are admitted to the United States as refugees are sponsored by one of nine resettlement agencies participating in the Refugee Admissions Reception and Placement (R&P) Program. The sponsoring agency is responsible for providing initial services, which include housing, essential furnishings, food, necessary seasonal clothing, cultural orientation, and assistance with access to other social, medical, and employment services for the refugees' first 30 - 90 days in the United States.

For more information about the R&P Program, please visit:

<http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/receptionplacement/index.htm>.

In addition to the R&P Program, refugees may be eligible for additional services from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). For more information about HHS benefits, visit the website of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) at:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr>.

Q. How can I find out the status of my refugee resettlement case?

A. All inquiries regarding the status of a case already referred to the USRAP should be addressed to the respective RSC that is assisting with your case. Arabic speakers are on hand to answer questions.

If your case is being processed in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, or the United Arab Emirates, please contact **RSC MENA**, which is operated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), at IC@iom.int or by calling +962 (6) 562 5077. You may also check the status of your case online at www.jordan.iom.int/refinfo.

If your case is being processed in Lebanon or Turkey, please contact **RSC TuME**, which is operated by the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), at info.rsc@icmc.net or by calling (0.212) 219 20 55. You may also check the status of your case online at rsc.icmc.net.

Please be ready to provide the RSC with your full name, date of birth, and 6-digit case number (for example: JO-123456). Please note that due to strict confidentiality guidelines, RSCs are not able to provide case updates to any third party, including family members.

Neither the U.S. Department of State nor its Resettlement Support Centers (RSCs) can provide information on cases still pending referral by the U.N. Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Individuals must be in touch with UNHCR directly regarding the status of their case.

Q. What if I am writing on behalf of a member of Congress?

A. All inquiries regarding case status should be directed to the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs (H). If a request is tasked to the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), a representative from the appropriate office will respond in due course.

Q. I live in the United States and would like to assist resettled refugees. How can I help?

A. Each refugee approved for admission to the United States is sponsored by one of nine resettlement agencies with local affiliates that provide direct services to refugees in 175 locations around the country. The initial services funded by the Department of State include: meeting refugees at the airport upon arrival; arranging for housing, essential furnishings, food, and clothing; and providing cultural orientation as well as assistance with access to other social, medical, and employment services. The local affiliates have their own practices for working with volunteers and collecting donations. We encourage you to contact the local affiliate(s) in your area to determine how you may be of assistance. Many locations have more than one refugee resettlement affiliate. Although this does not constitute an endorsement, the directory of affiliates can be found at <http://snip.state.gov/cdr>.

Q. How do I obtain more information about Syrian refugee processing?

A. Additional information on Syrian refugee assistance and resettlement can be found at the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) website: <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/index.htm>.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is free of charge to applicants. There is no need to contact a third party, such as an attorney or advocacy organization, regarding access.