



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

LIRS suggested talking points – Syrian refugee crisis

Top Level Messages

- We mourn for the murder of innocents, and we are gravely concerned for the safety of the refugees who have fled and are fleeing the violence of ISIS every day.
- Syrian refugees are fleeing the same kind of terror which we have seen unfolding in incidents around the world. The refugees do not bring terror with them. Rather, they are fleeing it.
- This is not an either/or situation. The United States can continue to welcome refugees while continuing to ensure our own security. We must do both.
- The United States handpicks the refugees who resettle here, and they go through multiple layers of security checks, making them the most thoroughly vetted group of people who come to the United States. Security screenings are rigorous and involve the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Department of Defense and multiple intelligence agencies.
- States cannot unilaterally block resettlement. Governors do not have the legal authority to determine who lives in their states. Refugees are legally admitted to the United States and, therefore, have the right to move freely throughout the country. Suggesting otherwise is an attack on fundamental rights that we as Americans hold true and is against everything that we stand for.
- We urge public officials to avoid knee-jerk reactions that politicize the events in Paris, to reject misplaced blame that creates an atmosphere of fear, and to stand in solidarity with Syrian refugees, who are themselves the victims of ISIS.
- The United States resettles refugees of all faiths. Keeping some Syrian refugees out of this country based on their religion sends the wrong message to the rest of the world about who we are as Americans. We are a welcoming country with a religiously diverse society and our resettlement program should continue to reflect this. To not do so only feeds into ISIS' propaganda and makes us all less safe.

Background: Security Screening of Refugees

- Intensive security screening by the US government of all refugees prior to admission to the US is, and will continue to be, a detailed and rigorous process. The U.S. hand picks the refugees who are resettled here.
- Refugees are the most scrutinized and screened individuals to enter the United States. The robust and multi-layered series of security checks include biometrics, medical screenings, interagency intelligence sharing, and in-person interviews with Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services officials are an extraordinary tool to ensure that the refugees we seek to protect will not pose a safety threat to the U.S.
- For additional details on the refugee security screening processes, please click here for [State Department Resettlement Fact sheet](#); [Security Screening of Refugees Admitted to the United States by the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants](#); [Congressional testimony by USCIS that details security processes](#), and [a letter to the Obama Administration from former US government officials](#).

Background: Process for refugees to be admitted to the United States

- In recent years, the U.S. has accepted between 50,000 to 75,000 refugees per year.

- The US has announced that it will accept 85,000 refugees in 2016, including 10,000 from Syria.
- Before a refugee can even be considered to come to the U.S., he or she must first be determined to be eligible. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) — or occasionally a U.S. embassy or another non-governmental organization (NGO) — determines which refugees (about 1 percent) should be resettled, which can take [four to 10 months](#).
- Once a case is referred from the UNHCR to the United States, a refugee [undergoes](#) a multi-layered security screening process that could take several rounds, an in-person interview with Department of State personnel, approval by the Department of Homeland Security, medical screening, a match with a sponsor agency, "cultural orientation" classes, and final security screening. This all happens before a refugee ever gets onto American soil.
- This intensive vetting process, as well as U.S law on refugees and asylum seekers, makes it difficult to quickly admit large numbers of refugees. On average, the vetting process takes 18 to 24 months.

Background: Conditions for Syrian refugees (source: UNHCR)

- More than 50% of the entire population of Syria has been displaced from their homes – by bombardment, civil war, and the growing threat of ISIS.
- Currently, there are over 4 million registered Syrian refugees in countries neighboring Syria including persons in: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and in several countries in North Africa.
- 76% of these refugees are women and children – imagine, 2 million children who have lost everything.
- Only 12% of refugees across the region live in formal refugee camps. Most live in urban settings.

How can you help?

- Contact Governors and local officials in states calling on them to continue to welcome resettled Syrian refugees.
- Designate a Sunday this fall or winter to observe [Refugee Sunday](#). Free materials include a video featuring the story of a Syrian refugee who is now safe in the U.S., and LIRS can help provide a speaker.
- Pray for Syrian refugees (the Refugee Sunday kit includes a worship guide and litany).
- Volunteer with our local refugee resettlement [partner](#) in your community. Help sponsor a family, collect furniture and material goods, be a mentor, or welcome new arrivals at the airport.
- Help support all of LIRS's work with refugees here: LIRS.org/SupportSyria. Your gift will enable us to continue to build welcoming communities for refugees and to provide essential support to refugees when they arrive to safety in the U.S.
- For general questions, ideas, or to volunteer to assist Syrian and other refugees, contact LIRS toll free at 844-230-2736 or send an email to outreach@lirs.org.

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