

# Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy

**name redacted**

Specialist in Immigration Policy

November 30, 2016

**Congressional Research Service**

7-....

[www.crs.gov](http://www.crs.gov)

RL31269

## Summary

A refugee is a person fleeing his or her 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. Typically, the annual number of refugees that can be admitted into the United States, known as the refugee ceiling, and the allocation of these numbers by region are set by the President after consultation with Congress at the start of each fiscal year.

For FY2017, the worldwide refugee ceiling is 110,000, with 96,000 admissions numbers allocated among the regions of the world and 14,000 numbers comprising an unallocated reserve. An unallocated reserve is to be used if, and where, a need develops for refugee slots in excess of the allocated numbers. The FY2017 regional allocations are, as follows: Africa (35,000), East Asia (12,000), Europe and Central Asia (4,000), Latin America/Caribbean (5,000), and Near East/South Asia (40,000).

Overseas processing of refugees is conducted through a system of three priorities for admission. *Priority 1* comprises cases involving persons facing compelling security concerns. *Priority 2* comprises cases involving persons from specific groups of special humanitarian concern to the United States (e.g., Iranian religious minorities). *Priority 3* comprises family reunification cases involving close relatives of persons admitted as refugees or granted asylum.

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS's) U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for adjudicating refugee cases. To be eligible for admission to the United States as a refugee, an individual must meet the definition of a refugee, not be firmly resettled in another country, be determined to be of special humanitarian concern to the United States, and be admissible to the United States.

Special legislative provisions make it easier for members of certain groups to obtain refugee status. The "Lautenberg Amendment," which was first enacted in 1989, allows certain former Soviet and Indochinese nationals to qualify for refugee status based on their membership in a protected category with a credible fear of persecution. In 2004, Congress amended the Lautenberg Amendment to add the "Specter Amendment," which requires the designation of categories of Iranian religious minorities whose cases are to be adjudicated under the Lautenberg Amendment's reduced evidentiary standard. The Lautenberg Amendment, as amended by the Specter Amendment, has been regularly extended. Most recently, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016 (P.L. 114-113) extends the Lautenberg Amendment through September 30, 2016.

The Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (HHS/ORR) administers an initial transitional assistance program for temporarily dependent refugees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, and others. The FY2016 appropriation for refugee and entrant assistance in P.L. 114-113 is \$1,674,691,000.

## **Contents**

Background and Definitions .....	1
Refugee Admissions .....	1
FY2017 Refugee Ceiling and Allocations.....	5
Refugee Processing Priorities .....	5
Refugee Adjudications .....	7
Admissibility of Refugees.....	7
Special Refugee Provisions.....	9
Lautenberg Amendment and Specter Amendment.....	9
Vietnamese Refugees .....	9
Refugee Resettlement Assistance .....	10

## **Tables**

Table 1. Refugee Admissions Ceilings and Regional Allocations, FY2006-FY2017 .....	4
Table 2. Refugee Resettlement Funding, FY2007-FY2016 .....	10
Table 3. Refugee Eligibility for Major Federal Public Assistance Programs .....	11

## **Appendixes**

Appendix. Refugee Admissions by Region.....	12
---	----

## **Contacts**

Author Contact Information .....	13
----------------------------------	----

## Background and Definitions

The admission of refugees to the United States and their resettlement here are authorized by the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), as amended by the Refugee Act of 1980.<sup>1</sup> The 1980 Act had two basic purposes: (1) to provide a uniform procedure for refugee admissions; and (2) to authorize federal assistance to resettle refugees and promote their self-sufficiency. The intent of the legislation was to end an ad hoc approach to refugee admissions and resettlement that had characterized U.S. refugee policy since World War II.

Under the INA, a *refugee* is a person who is outside his or her country and who is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.<sup>2</sup> In special circumstances, a refugee also may be a person who is within his or her country and who is persecuted or has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Excluded from the INA definition of a refugee is any person who participated in the persecution of another.<sup>3</sup>

The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) of the Department of State (DOS) coordinates and manages the U.S. refugee program, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) makes final determinations about eligibility for admission. Refugees are processed and admitted to the United States from abroad. Separate provision is made in the INA for the granting of *asylum* on a case-by-case basis to aliens who are physically present in the United States or at a land border or port of entry and who meet the definition of a refugee.<sup>4</sup> After one year in refugee status in the United States, refugees are required to apply to adjust to lawful permanent resident (LPR) status.<sup>5</sup>

## Refugee Admissions

The United States aims to consider for resettlement at least half of the refugees referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) worldwide each year, depending on the availability of funding. By law, the annual number of refugee admissions and the allocation of these numbers by region of the world are set by the President after consultation with Congress.<sup>6</sup> Each year, the President submits a report to the House of Representatives and the Senate, known as the *consultation document*, which contains the Administration's proposed worldwide refugee ceiling and regional allocations for the upcoming fiscal year.<sup>7</sup> Following congressional consultations on the Administration's proposal, the President issues a Presidential Determination

<sup>1</sup> The INA is Act of June 27, 1952, ch. 477, codified, as amended, at 8 U.S.C. §§1101 *et seq.* The Refugee Act is P.L. 96-212, March 17, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> INA §101(a)(42)(A). This definition conforms with the definition used in the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.

<sup>3</sup> INA §101(a)(42).

<sup>4</sup> INA §208.

<sup>5</sup> INA §209(a). Asylees (those granted asylum) may apply for LPR status after one year, but are not required to do so. There are no numerical limitations on refugee or asylee adjustments of status.

<sup>6</sup> INA §207(a).

<sup>7</sup> The consultation document for FY2017 is U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017: Report to the Congress*, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/262168.pdf> (hereinafter cited as *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017*).

setting the refugee numbers for that year.<sup>8</sup> **Table 1** shows refugee admissions ceilings and regional allocations for FY2006-FY2017.

The U.S. refugee program was greatly impacted by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In the aftermath of those attacks, a review of refugee-related security procedures was undertaken, refugee admissions were briefly suspended, and enhanced security measures were implemented. As a result of these and other factors, refugee admissions, which had totaled about 70,000 in FY2001, plunged to historically low levels in the years following the attacks. In FY2002, for example, actual admissions totaled 27,131.<sup>9</sup>

Admissions subsequently rebounded, as shown in **Table 1**, exceeding 70,000 in each of FY2009 and FY2010, when the refugee ceiling was 80,000. As also shown in **Table 1**, however, there were significantly fewer admissions in FY2011 (56,424) and FY2012 (58,238); the refugee ceiling was 80,000 and 76,000, respectively, in those years. The FY2013 consultation document attributed the shortfalls in refugee arrivals in FY2011 and FY2012 largely to new security requirements.<sup>10</sup>

Refugee admissions have increased since FY2013, with admissions in FY2013, FY2014, and FY2015 falling just under each year's 70,000 ceiling. The FY2014 consultation document offered the following explanation for the increased level of admissions in FY2013:

Refugee arrivals in FY 2013 are up sharply from the previous two years thanks to the concerted efforts of the many partners involved in U.S. resettlement... This success was made possible in part by better synchronization of security and medical checks for refugee families as well as investments in UNHCR's ability to refer refugees from the Middle East and Africa.<sup>11</sup>

The FY2016 refugee ceiling was 85,000, and actual admissions that year were just below that number. The ceiling for FY2017 is 110,000. The FY2017 consultation document, issued in the summer of 2016, included the following about the FY2016 and FY2017 ceilings:

[The proposed ceiling for 2017] represents a 57 percent increase over a two-year period from the 70,000 refugees admitted to the United States in 2015. In [FY2016], 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 [U.S. refugee admissions program] significantly reduced the time between certain steps in the process ... and thus decreased overall processing time without curtailing the program's robust security checks.

<sup>8</sup> Asylees are not included in the refugee ceiling. There are no numerical limitations on the granting of asylum.

<sup>9</sup> Prior to the 2001 terrorist attacks, annual refugee admissions had not been below 30,000 since FY1977, when admissions totaled about 20,000. From FY1979 through FY2001, annual refugee admissions exceeded 60,000. For annual data on refugee admissions by region since FY1987, see **Appendix**. For data on refugee admissions in earlier years, see the State Department Refugee Processing Center cumulative summary of refugee admissions, <http://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/> (under Cumulative Summary tab).

<sup>10</sup> See U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2013: Report to the Congress*, pp. iv-v, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/198157.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2014: Report to the Congress*, p. ii, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/219137.pdf> (hereinafter cited as *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2014*).

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.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017*, pp. ii-iii.

**Table I. Refugee Admissions Ceilings and Regional Allocations, FY2006-FY2017**

Region	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017
Africa	20,000	22,000	16,000	12,000	15,500	15,000	12,000	15,950 <sup>a</sup>	17,500 <sup>b</sup>	20,400 <sup>c</sup>	27,500 <sup>d</sup>	35,000
East Asia	15,000	16,000 <sup>e</sup>	20,000	20,500 <sup>f</sup>	18,000 <sup>g</sup>	19,000	18,000	16,600 <sup>a</sup>	14,700 <sup>b</sup>	17,300 <sup>c</sup>	14,000 <sup>d</sup>	12,000
Europe and Central Asia	15,000	6,500	3,000	2,500	2,500	2,000	2,000	650 <sup>a</sup>	1,000	2,300 <sup>c</sup>	4,000	4,000
Latin America/Caribbean	5,000	5,000	5,000 <sup>h</sup>	5,500 <sup>f</sup>	5,500 <sup>g</sup>	5,500	5,500	4,400 <sup>a</sup>	4,300 <sup>b</sup>	2,300 <sup>c</sup>	1,500 <sup>d</sup>	5,000
Near East/South Asia	5,000	9,000 <sup>e</sup>	28,000	39,500 <sup>f</sup>	38,000 <sup>g</sup>	35,500	35,500	32,400 <sup>a</sup>	32,500 <sup>b</sup>	27,700 <sup>c</sup>	38,000 <sup>d</sup>	40,000
Unallocated	10,000	11,500	8,000 <sup>h</sup>	— <sup>f</sup>	500 <sup>g</sup>	3,000	3,000	— <sup>a</sup>	— <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>c</sup>	— <sup>d</sup>	14,000
<b>Total ceilings</b>	<b>70,000</b>	<b>70,000</b>	<b>80,000</b>	<b>80,000</b>	<b>80,000</b>	<b>80,000</b>	<b>76,000</b>	<b>70,000</b>	<b>70,000</b>	<b>70,000</b>	<b>85,000</b>	<b>110,000</b>
Actual admissions	41,223	48,282	60,191	74,654	73,311	56,424	58,238	69,926	69,987	69,933	84,995	N/A

**Sources:** For ceiling and allocation data: PD 2004-06, October 21, 2003; PD 2004-53, September 30, 2004; PD 2006-3, October 24, 2005; PD 2007-1, October 11, 2006; PD 2008-1, October 2, 2007; PD 2008-29, September 30, 2008; PD 2009-32, September 30, 2009; PD 2011-02, October 8, 2010; PD 2011-17, September 30, 2011; PD 2012-17, September 28, 2012; PD 2014-01, October 2, 2013; PD 2014-17, September 30, 2014; PD 2015-14, September 29, 2015; PD 2016-13, September 28, 2016. U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Justice, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Proposed Refugee Admissions ...*, FY2006-FY2017. For actual admissions data: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration.

- Of the FY2013 ceiling of 70,000, 67,000 numbers were originally allocated by region and 3,000 were unallocated. The unallocated reserve was tapped, and regional allocations were shifted during the year to provide 3,000 additional numbers to Africa and Near East/South Asia; all the original regional allocations were changed.
- Of the FY2014 ceiling of 70,000, 68,000 numbers were originally allocated by region and 2,000 were unallocated. The unallocated reserve was tapped, and regional allocations were shifted during the year to provide 2,000 additional numbers to Africa and East Asia; all the original regional allocations were changed except that for Europe and Central Asia.
- Of the FY2015 ceiling of 70,000, 68,000 numbers were originally allocated by region and 2,000 were unallocated. The unallocated reserve was tapped, and regional allocations were shifted during the year to provide 2,000 additional numbers to Africa, East Asia, and Europe and Central Asia; all the original regional allocations were changed.
- Of the FY2016 ceiling of 85,000, 79,000 numbers were originally allocated by region and 6,000 were unallocated. The unallocated reserve was tapped, and regional allocations were shifted during the year to provide 6,000 additional numbers to Africa, East Asia, and Near East/South Asia; all the original regional allocations were changed except those for Europe and Central Asia.
- Of the FY2007 ceiling of 70,000, 50,000 numbers were originally allocated by region and 20,000 were unallocated. The unallocated reserve was tapped during the year to provide 8,500 additional numbers to East Asia and Near East/South Asia.
- Of the FY2009 ceiling of 80,000, 75,000 numbers were originally allocated by region and 5,000 were unallocated. The unallocated reserve was tapped during the year to provide 5,000 additional numbers to East Asia, Latin America/Caribbean, and Near East/South Asia.
- Of the FY2010 ceiling of 80,000, 75,000 numbers were originally allocated by region and 5,000 were unallocated. The unallocated reserve was tapped during the year to provide 4,500 additional numbers to East Asia, Latin America/Caribbean, and Near East/South Asia.
- Of the FY2008 ceiling of 80,000, 70,000 numbers were originally allocated by region and 10,000 were unallocated. The unallocated reserve was tapped during the year to provide 2,000 additional numbers to Latin America/Caribbean.

## FY2017 Refugee Ceiling and Allocations

On September 28, 2016, President Obama signed the Presidential Determination setting the FY2017 worldwide refugee ceiling and regional levels.<sup>13</sup> As discussed, the FY2017 ceiling is 110,000.<sup>14</sup>

The FY2017 refugee ceiling of 110,000 includes 96,000 admissions numbers allocated among the regions of the world and an unallocated reserve of 14,000 numbers. The FY2017 regional allocations are intended to cover previously approved refugees in the pipeline as well as new cases. An unallocated reserve is to be used if, and where, a need develops for refugee slots in excess of the allocated numbers. This has occurred regularly in recent years, as detailed in **Table 1**.

Africa has been allocated 35,000 refugee admissions numbers for FY2017. FY2016 admissions totaled 31,625.<sup>15</sup> FY2017 admissions are expected to come primarily from the Great Lakes region and East Africa and to include Congolese, Somalis, and Eritreans, among others.

East Asia's FY2017 allocation is 12,000. FY2016 admissions totaled 12,518. FY2017 admissions are expected to consist primarily of Burmese refugees living in Malaysia and Thailand.

Europe and Central Asia have a combined FY2017 allocation of 4,000 refugee numbers. FY2016 admissions for this region totaled 3,957. The 2017 allocation includes projected admissions of "Lautenberg Amendment" cases from the former Soviet Union (see "Lautenberg Amendment and Specter Amendment").

The FY2017 allocation for Latin America and the Caribbean is 5,000. FY2016 admissions totaled 1,340. FY2017 admissions from this region are expected to include Cubans and Colombians as well as minors from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras gaining admission under the Central American Minors (CAM) refugee program.<sup>16</sup>

The Near East/South Asia FY2017 allocation is 40,000. FY2016 admissions totaled 35,555. FY2017 admissions are expected to include Syrians, Iraqis, Bhutanese, Iranians, Pakistanis, and Afghans.<sup>17</sup>

## Refugee Processing Priorities

PRM is responsible for processing refugee cases. Generally, it arranges for a non-governmental organization (NGO), an international organization, or U.S. embassy contractors to manage a Resettlement Support Center (RSC) that assists in refugee processing. RSC staff conduct pre-screening interviews of prospective refugees and prepare cases for submission to USCIS, which handles refugee adjudications. Refugee processing is conducted through a system of three priorities for admission. These priorities provide access to U.S. resettlement consideration and are separate and distinct from whether such persons qualify for refugee status.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. President [Obama], "Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2016," Presidential Determination No. 2015-14 of September 29, 2015, 80 *Federal Register*, pp. 62433-62434, October 16, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> For additional information about the setting of the FY2016 refugee ceiling, see CRS Report R44277, *Syrian Refugee Admissions and Resettlement in the United States: In Brief*, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> See **Appendix** for annual refugee admissions numbers by region since FY1987.

<sup>16</sup> For further information about the CAM program, see CRS Report R44020, *In-Country Refugee Processing: In Brief*.

<sup>17</sup> For additional information on the FY2017 regional allocations, see *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017*.

*Priority 1* covers refugees for whom resettlement seems to be the appropriate durable solution, who are referred to the U.S. refugee program by UNHCR, a U.S. embassy, or a designated NGO. Such persons often have compelling protection needs, and may be in danger of attack or of being returned to the country they fled. All nationalities are eligible for this priority.

*Priority 2* covers groups of special humanitarian concern to the United States. It includes specific groups that may be defined by their nationalities, clans, ethnicities, or other characteristics. Unlike Priority 1 cases, individuals falling under Priority 2 are able to access the U.S. refugee program without a UNHCR, embassy, or NGO referral. Some P-2 programs, such as those for Cuban dissidents and certain former Soviet nationals (see “Lautenberg Amendment and Specter Amendment”), process applicants in their country of origin. Another P-2 in-country processing program is the Central American Minors (CAM) program for certain minors in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.<sup>18</sup>

Some Priority 2 groups are processed outside their country of origin. These include Burmese in refugee camps in Thailand and Iranian religious minorities processed in Austria and Turkey (see “Lautenberg Amendment and Specter Amendment”). Another P-2 group, Iraqis associated with the United States, is eligible for in-country processing in Iraq as well as processing outside that country.<sup>19</sup>

*Priority 3* covers family reunification cases. Refugee applications under Priority 3 are based upon an *affidavit of relationship* (AOR) filed by an eligible relative in the United States. The Priority 3 program is limited to designated nationalities. For FY2017, Priority 3 processing is available to nationals of 22 countries.<sup>20</sup> Individuals falling under Priority 3, like those falling under Priority 2, are able to access the U.S. refugee program without a UNHCR, embassy, or NGO referral.

The Priority 3 program has changed over the years. Since FY2004, qualifying family members have been the spouses, unmarried children under age 21, and parents of persons who were admitted to the United States as refugees or granted asylum.<sup>21</sup> In October 2008, the U.S. refugee program stopped accepting applications under Priority 3.<sup>22</sup> Earlier in 2008, processing of Priority

<sup>18</sup> See CRS Report R44020, *In-Country Refugee Processing: In Brief*.

<sup>19</sup> The Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2007 (Division A, Title XII, Subtitle C of P.L. 110-181, January 28, 2008) designates certain Iraqis for P-2 processing.

<sup>20</sup> The countries are: 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, and Uzbekistan. *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017*, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> During the late 1990s, the State Department found that a large number of Priority 3 applications were received from persons who did not qualify for refugee status and that there was a significant amount of fraud associated with these applications. To address these problems, the U.S. government reduced the number of nationalities eligible for such refugee slots. For FY2003, four nationalities were eligible for Priority 3 processing. For FY2004, the Priority 3 program was revised on a pilot basis. To simultaneously broaden access to the program and continue to address concerns about fraud, the number of eligible nationalities was increased to nine, while the types of qualifying relationships were restricted. As noted above, eligibility for Priority 3 currently requires a qualifying relationship with an individual who was admitted to the United States as a refugee or granted asylum. Prior to FY2004, this processing priority was available to those with qualifying relationships with a much wider range of legal U.S. residents without regard to how these residents gained admission to the United States. In another change, since FY2004, children have to be under age 21 to be eligible for Priority 3. In the past, this processing priority was also available to older unmarried sons and daughters. These changes to the Priority 3 qualifying relationships have remained in place since FY2004.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, “Fraud in the Refugee Family Reunification (Priority Three) Program,” fact sheet, December 4, 2008, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/g/prm/refadm/rls/fs/2008/112760.htm>.

3 cases was suspended in certain locations in Africa “due to indications of extremely high rates of fraud obtained through pilot DNA testing.”<sup>23</sup>

The Priority 3 program resumed in October 2012 with a new AOR form and requirement for DNA evidence of certain claimed biological parent-child relationships. To file an AOR, the U.S.-based relative must be at least age 18 and must file within five years of being granted asylum or admitted to the United States as a refugee. The first refugees admitted to the United States under the revamped P-3 program arrived in FY2015.

## Refugee Adjudications

The Secretary of DHS has discretionary authority to admit refugees to the United States. USCIS is responsible for adjudicating refugee cases. In order to be eligible for admission to the United States as a refugee, an individual must meet the INA definition of a refugee, not be firmly resettled in another country, be determined to be of special humanitarian concern to the United States, and be admissible to the United States.<sup>24</sup> In the past, the majority of refugee adjudications were conducted by USCIS officers on temporary duty from domestic asylum offices. Today, these adjudications are handled by USCIS officers in the Refugee Corps.

## Admissibility of Refugees

In order to be admitted to the United States, a prospective refugee must be *admissible* under immigration law. The INA sets forth various grounds of inadmissibility, which include health-related grounds, security-related grounds, public charge (i.e., indigence), and lack of proper documentation.<sup>25</sup> Some inadmissibility grounds (public charge, lack of proper documentation) are not applicable to refugees. Others can be waived for humanitarian purposes, to assure family unity, or when it is otherwise in the public interest.<sup>26</sup> Of particular relevance to the admission of refugees are certain health-related and security-related grounds of inadmissibility.

Under the INA health-related grounds of inadmissibility, an alien who is determined, in accordance with Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regulations, to have a communicable disease of public health significance is inadmissible. Until recently, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection was defined to be one of these diseases, although HIV-infected refugees could apply for a waiver. In 2008, Congress amended the INA to eliminate the reference to HIV infection as a health-related ground of inadmissibility.<sup>27</sup> And effective January 4, 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of HHS amended its regulations to remove HIV infection from the definition of a communicable disease of public health significance.<sup>28</sup>

Since 1990, the security-related grounds of inadmissibility in the INA have expressly included terrorism-related grounds. Over the years, the terrorism-related grounds have been amended to lower the threshold for how substantial, apparent, and immediate an alien’s support for a terrorist

<sup>23</sup> *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2014*, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> INA §207(c).

<sup>25</sup> INA §212(a).

<sup>26</sup> Certain grounds of inadmissibility, including most security-related grounds, cannot be waived.

<sup>27</sup> P.L. 110-293, Title III, §305, July 30, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Medical Examination of Aliens—Removal of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Infection From Definition of Communicable Disease of Public Health Significance,” 74 *Federal Register*, pp. 56547-56562, November 2, 2009.

activity or organization may be for the alien to be rendered inadmissible.<sup>29</sup> Among the current terrorism-related grounds, an alien is generally inadmissible for engaging in terrorist activity if he or she gives any material support, such as a safe house, transportation, communications, or funds, to a terrorist organization or any of its members or to a person engaged in terrorist activity. The Secretary of State or the DHS Secretary, after consultation with the other and the Attorney General, may exercise discretionary waiver authority over certain terrorism-related grounds of inadmissibility. Both the Secretary of State and the Secretary of DHS have used this authority to grant exemptions from the terrorism-related inadmissibility grounds to certain categories of individuals and for certain types of support.<sup>30</sup>

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, specifies groups that, for purposes of the INA terrorism-related grounds of inadmissibility, are not to be considered terrorist organizations on the basis of past acts.<sup>31</sup> Thus, a prospective refugee who was a member of, or provided support to, one of these groups would not be inadmissible on the basis of those actions. More broadly, the Consolidated Appropriations Act expands the discretionary authority of the Secretary of State and the Secretary of DHS to grant waivers of the terrorism-related grounds of inadmissibility generally. Measures subsequently enacted in 2008 and 2014 limit the application of the INA's terrorism-related provisions with respect to other specific groups.<sup>32</sup>

### *Security Screening*

In order to be admissible to the United States under the INA security-related grounds of inadmissibility discussed above, a prospective refugee must clear all required security checks. A December 2015 DHS fact sheet summarizes the security screening process, as follows:

All refugee applicants receive a standard suite of biographic and biometric security checks. Through close coordination with the federal law enforcement and intelligence communities, these checks are continually reviewed to identify potential enhancements and to develop approaches for specific populations that may pose particular threats. All case members included on a refugee application must clear security checks for that application to be approved.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See archived CRS Report RL32564, *Immigration: Terrorist Grounds for Exclusion and Removal of Aliens*.

<sup>30</sup> See U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Terrorism-Related Inadmissibility Grounds Exemptions," <https://www.uscis.gov/laws/terrorism-related-inadmissability-ground/terrorism-related-inadmissibility-ground-exemptions>.

<sup>31</sup> P.L. 110-161, Division J, Title VI, §691, December 26, 2007. DHS and DOS followed this enactment with a series of *Federal Register* notices similarly stating that the terrorism-related grounds of inadmissibility would generally be waived with respect to any assistance provided by an alien to any of the entities expressly exempted by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, from being deemed terrorist organizations. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Secretary, and Department of State, Office of the Secretary, "Exercise of Authority Under Section 212(d)(3)(B)(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act" [10 separate notices with same title], 73 *Federal Register* 34770-34777, June 18, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> See P.L. 110-257, July 1, 2008; P.L. 113-291, §1264, December 19, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Office of Communications, *Refugee Security Screening*, fact sheet, December 3, 2015. [https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Refugee%2C%20Asylum%2C%20and%20Int%271%20Ops/Refugee\\_Security\\_Screening\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Refugee%2C%20Asylum%2C%20and%20Int%271%20Ops/Refugee_Security_Screening_Fact_Sheet.pdf). The fact sheet enumerates the biographic and biometric checks.

## Special Refugee Provisions

### Lautenberg Amendment and Specter Amendment

The “Lautenberg Amendment” is a provision of the FY1990 Foreign Operations Appropriations Act. It requires the Attorney General to designate categories of former Soviet and Indochinese nationals for whom less evidence is needed to prove refugee status, and provides for adjustment to permanent resident status of certain Soviet and Indochinese nationals granted parole after being denied refugee status.<sup>34</sup> To be eligible to apply for refugee status under the special provision, an individual must have close family in the United States. Applicants under the Lautenberg standard are required to prove that they are members of a protected category with a credible, but not necessarily individual, fear of persecution. By contrast, the INA requires prospective refugees to establish a well-founded fear of persecution on an individual basis.

The Lautenberg Amendment has been regularly extended in appropriations acts, although there have often been gaps between extensions. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2004, in addition to extending the amendment through FY2004, amended the Lautenberg Amendment to add a new provision known as the “Specter Amendment.”<sup>35</sup> The Specter Amendment requires the designation of categories of Iranian nationals, specifically religious minorities, for whom less evidence is needed to prove refugee status. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, extends the Lautenberg Amendment through September 30, 2016.<sup>36</sup> As of this writing, the Lautenberg Amendment has not been enacted for FY2017.

### Vietnamese Refugees

The “McCain Amendment,” which is no longer in effect, was first enacted in the FY1997 Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act.<sup>37</sup> It covered certain adult children, whose parents were Vietnamese re-education camp survivors and had been accepted for U.S. refugee resettlement. The amendment made the adult children eligible for U.S. refugee resettlement. It was subsequently amended and extended through FY1999.

In November 1999, the McCain Amendment was re-enacted in revised form for FY2000 and FY2001 in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2000.<sup>38</sup> As revised, it applied to the adult children of a re-education camp survivor who was residing in the United States or awaiting departure from Vietnam and who, after April 1995, was accepted for U.S. refugee resettlement or for admission as an immediate relative immigrant. The April 1995 date restriction did not apply to children who were previously denied refugee resettlement because their documents did not show continuous co-residency with their parent.

Legislation to amend and extend the provision through FY2003 was approved by the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress in May 2002.<sup>39</sup> This law eliminated the existing April 1995 date restriction. Thus, children who were previously denied refugee resettlement for reasons other than co-residency

<sup>34</sup> P.L. 101-167, Title V, §599D and §599E, November 21, 1989. Parole is a temporary authorization to enter the United States and is typically granted when the alien’s entry is determined to be in the public interest.

<sup>35</sup> P.L. 108-199, Division E, Title II, §213, January 23, 2004.

<sup>36</sup> P.L. 114-113, Div. K, §7034(k), December 18, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> P.L. 104-208, Division A, Section 101(c), §584, September 30, 1996.

<sup>38</sup> P.L. 106-113, Appendix G, Division A, §255, November 29, 1999.

<sup>39</sup> P.L. 107-185, May 30, 2002.

could also have their cases reconsidered. This revised provision, which was regularly extended,<sup>40</sup> is sometimes referred to as the “McCain-Davis Amendment.” The McCain-Davis Amendment was last extended, through FY2010, by the Omnibus Appropriations Act, 2009.<sup>41</sup> This extension was repealed, however, by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2010.<sup>42</sup>

## Refugee Resettlement Assistance

The Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (HHS/ORR), within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), administers a transitional assistance program for temporarily dependent refugees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, and other specified groups. Since its establishment in 1980, the refugee resettlement program has been justified on the grounds that the admission of refugees is a federal decision, entailing some federal responsibility. Unlike immigrants who enter through family or employment ties, refugees are admitted on humanitarian grounds, and there is no requirement that they demonstrate economic self-sufficiency.

For FY2016, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, which included appropriations for the Departments of Labor, HHS, and Education, and related agencies, provided \$1,674,691,000 for ORR programs. A full-year FY2017 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill has not been enacted as of this writing. **Table 2** details refugee resettlement funding for FY2007-FY2016.

**Table 2. Refugee Resettlement Funding, FY2007-FY2016**

(budget authority in millions of dollars)

Programs	FY07 Enacted	FY08 Enacted	FY09 Enacted	FY10 Actual	FY11 Enacted	FY12 Actual	FY13 Enacted	FY14 Actual	FY15 Actual	FY16 Enacted
Transitional/Cash and Medical Services	\$265.5	\$296.1	\$282.3	\$353.3	\$352.6	\$323.2	\$401.1	\$391.5	\$383.3	\$490.0
Social Services	154.0	154.0	154.0	154.0	153.7	124.3	149.9	149.9	149.9	155.0
Targeted Assistance	48.6	48.6	48.6	48.6	48.5	28.1	47.6	47.6	47.6	47.6
Preventive Health	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.6
Victims of Trafficking <sup>a</sup>	9.8	9.8	9.8	9.8	9.8	9.8	9.3	13.8	15.8	18.8
Victims of Torture <sup>b</sup>	9.8	9.8	10.8	11.1	11.1	11.0	10.7	10.7	10.7	10.7
Unaccompanied Alien Children <sup>c</sup>	95.3	132.6	205.1	149.3	149.1	267.2	376.1	911.8	948.0	948.0
<b>Total<sup>d</sup></b>	<b>\$587.8</b>	<b>\$655.6</b>	<b>\$715.4</b>	<b>\$730.8</b>	<b>\$729.5</b>	<b>\$768.3</b>	<b>\$999.4</b>	<b>\$1,529.9</b>	<b>\$1,559.9</b>	<b>\$1,674.7</b>

**Sources:** U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, *Justifications of Estimates for Appropriations Committees*, FY2009-FY2017.

<sup>40</sup> It was extended by P.L. 108-447, P.L. 109-102, and P.L. 110-161.

<sup>41</sup> P.L. 111-8, Division H, §7034(d), March 11, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> P.L. 111-117, Division F, §7034(d).

- a. Funding used primarily for administrative cost of certifying that an alien is a trafficking victim for purposes of receiving benefits and services.
- b. Funding used for rehabilitation services, social services, and legal services for torture victims and for provision of research and training to health care providers.
- c. Program serves children under age 18 who do not have lawful immigration status and do not have a parent or legal guardian in the United States available to provide physical custody and care.
- d. Sum of amounts may not equal total due to rounding.

ORR-funded refugee assistance activities include refugee cash and medical assistance, social services to help refugees become socially and economically self-sufficient, and targeted assistance for impacted areas. Special refugee cash assistance (RCA) and refugee medical assistance (RMA) are the heart of the refugee program, accounting for a greater portion of the ORR annual budget than any other activity for refugees (see **Table 2**).<sup>43</sup> RCA and RMA, which in most cases are administered by states, are intended to help needy refugees who are ineligible to receive benefits from mainstream federal assistance programs. RCA and RMA are currently available to refugees for eight months after entry.<sup>44</sup> RMA benefits are based on the state's Medicaid program, and RCA payments are now based on the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) payment to a family unit of the same size.

The ORR program was significantly affected by the 1996 welfare reform act and subsequent amendments.<sup>45</sup> Prior to this legislation, refugees who otherwise met the requirements of federal public assistance programs were immediately and indefinitely eligible to participate in them just like U.S. citizens. Now, refugees and other specified humanitarian entrants are subject to time limits. **Table 3** summarizes the time limits on refugee eligibility for four major public assistance programs.

**Table 3. Refugee Eligibility for Major Federal Public Assistance Programs**

Program	Eligibility
Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for the Aged, Blind and Disabled	Eligible for seven years after entry. <sup>a</sup>
Medicaid (non-emergency care)	Eligible for seven years after entry, then state option.
TANF	Eligible for five years after entry, then state option.
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (formerly, Food Stamps)	Eligible without time limits.

- a. A temporary provision (in P.L. 110-328, September 30, 2008) extended to nine years (during FY2009 through FY2011) the period of eligibility of certain refugees and others for SSI benefits, provided that specified criteria were met.

<sup>43</sup> Although the unaccompanied alien children (UAC) program is under ORR, it is not a program for refugees (see table notes accompanying **Table 2**). The separate unaccompanied refugee minors program serves refugee children in the United States who do not have a parent or other relative available to provide care; it is funded through the transitional/cash and medical services program.

<sup>44</sup> INA §412(e)(1) authorizes ORR to reimburse states for RCA and RMA for 36 months. Initially, beginning in April 1980, RCA and RMA were available for the full 36 months. As appropriations levels decreased in subsequent years, however, the period of coverage was reduced. Since October 1991, RCA and RMA have been available to needy refugees for eight months after entry.

<sup>45</sup> The 1996 welfare reform law is the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, P.L. 104-193, August 22, 1996.

## Appendix. Refugee Admissions by Region

FY	Africa	East Asia	Eastern Europe	Former Soviet Union	Latin America/ Caribbean	Near East/ South Asia	Total
1987	1,990	40,099	8,396	3,699	323	10,021	64,528
1988	1,593	35,371	7,510	20,411	3,230 <sup>a</sup>	8,368	76,483
1989	1,902	45,722	8,752	39,602	4,116 <sup>a</sup>	6,976 <sup>a</sup>	107,070
1990	3,453	51,604 <sup>a</sup>	6,094	50,628	5,308 <sup>a</sup>	4,979	122,066
1991	4,420	53,522	6,837	39,226	4,042 <sup>a</sup>	5,342	113,389
1992	5,470	51,899	2,915	61,397	3,947 <sup>a</sup>	6,903	132,531
1993	6,967	49,817	2,582	48,773	4,322 <sup>a</sup>	6,987	119,448
1994	5,860	43,564	7,707	43,854	6,156	5,840	112,981
1995	4,827	36,987	10,070	35,951	7,629	4,510	99,974
1996	7,604	19,321	12,145	29,816	3,550	3,967	76,403
1997	6,065	8,594	21,401	27,331	2,996	4,101	70,488
1998	6,887	10,854	30,842	23,557	1,627	3,313	77,080
1999	13,043	10,206	38,658	17,410	2,110	4,098	85,525
2000	17,561	4,561	22,561	15,103	3,232	10,129	73,147
2001	19,020	4,163	15,794	15,978	2,975	11,956	69,886
2002	2,551	3,512	5,459	9,969	1,934	3,706	27,131
2003	10,714	1,724	2,506	8,744	455	4,260	28,403
2004	29,104	8,084	9,254 <sup>b</sup>		3,577	2,854	52,873
2005	20,745	12,076	11,316 <sup>b</sup>		6,699	2,977	53,813
2006	18,126	5,659	10,456 <sup>b</sup>		3,264	3,718	41,223
2007	17,483	15,643	4,560 <sup>b</sup>		2,976	7,620	48,282
2008	8,935	19,489	2,343 <sup>b</sup>		4,277	25,147	60,191
2009	9,670	19,850	1,997 <sup>b</sup>		4,857	38,280	74,654
2010	13,305	17,716	1,526 <sup>b</sup>		4,982	35,782	73,311
2011	7,685	17,367	1,228 <sup>b</sup>		2,976	27,168	56,424
2012	10,608	14,366	1,129 <sup>b</sup>		2,078	30,057	58,238
2013	15,980	16,537	580		4,439	32,391	69,927
2014	17,476	14,784	959		4,318	32,450	69,987
2015	22,472	18,469	2,363		2,050	24,579	69,933
2016	31,625	12,518	3,957		1,340	35,555	84,995

**Source:** U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration.

**Notes:** Data for FY1987-FY2000 are as of June 30, 2002. Data for FY2001-FY2013 are as of January 31, 2014. Data for FY2014-FY2016 are as of October 31, 2016.

a. Includes refugees admitted under the Private Sector Initiative (PSI), most of whom were Cuban.

- b. Beginning in FY2004, the categories of Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union were combined into a single category, Europe and Central Asia. These are the total admissions under that category.

## **Author Contact Information**

(name redacted)  
Specialist in Immigration Policy  
[redacted]@crs.loc.gov....

## EveryCRSReport.com

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) is a federal legislative branch agency, housed inside the Library of Congress, charged with providing the United States Congress non-partisan advice on issues that may come before Congress.

EveryCRSReport.com republishes CRS reports that are available to all Congressional staff. The reports are not classified, and Members of Congress routinely make individual reports available to the public.

Prior to our republication, we redacted names, phone numbers and email addresses of analysts who produced the reports. We also added this page to the report. We have not intentionally made any other changes to any report published on EveryCRSReport.com.

CRS reports, as a work of the United States government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.

Information in a CRS report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to members of Congress in connection with CRS' institutional role.

EveryCRSReport.com is not a government website and is not affiliated with CRS. We do not claim copyright on any CRS report we have republished.