Detailed Description of United States Refugee Admissions Program Security Vetting

The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is often referred to as the gold standard of immigration vetting due to its rigorous, multi-layered screening process. This process is designed to ensure that only individuals who meet strict eligibility and security requirements are admitted to the United States. **Here's how it works:**

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STEP 1 — Referral

No Direct Application: Individuals cannot apply to USRAP independently. They must be referred by:

1. U.S. government (e.g. State or Homeland Security)
2. Designated non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
3. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Mission-Connected Referrals: Many Afghan refugees in the USRAP pipeline were referred because of their work with or support for U.S. military or diplomatic missions, placing them at heightened risk in Afghanistan.

STEP 2 — Registration and Pre-Screening

Initial Registration: The Department of State's Resettlement Support Center (RSC) collects detailed information about the applicant, including personal history, family relationships, and reasons for persecution.

1. **Pre-Screening Interview:** RSC staff conduct interviews to verify the applicant's story and assess initial eligibility under U.S. refugee law.
2. **Data Collection:** Biographic information (names, addresses, birth dates) and biometric data (fingerprints and photographs) are collected and cross-checked against U.S. and international databases.

STEP 3 — Comprehensive Security Vetting

Multi-Agency Screening: Security checks are conducted by: DHS, FBI, NCTC, Defense (DoD), and intelligence agencies..

Database Cross-Checks: Biometric and biographical data are run through databases to identify any connections to criminal, terrorist, or other security threats. These include:

1. FBI Terrorist Screening Database (TSDB),
2. Interpol's international criminal databases,
3. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) databases, and
4. DHS's Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT).

Continuous Monitoring: Security vetting does not stop after initial approval. Applicants are monitored for any new information or threats until they arrive in the U.S.

STEP 4 — In-Person DHS Interview

Conducted by USCIS Officers: Trained officers from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), part of DHS, interview each applicant in person to confirm the applicant's identity, assess their credibility, and ensure they meet the legal definition of a refugee.

Fraud Detection: Officers are trained to detect fraud and inconsistencies in an applicant's story. Applicants are questioned about their background, reasons for fleeing, and any potential security concerns.

STEP 5 — Medical Screening

Health Examination: All applicants undergo a medical examination conducted by a panel physician to identify communicable diseases (e.g., tuberculosis) or other conditions requiring treatment before arrival.

Vaccination Requirements: Applicants must comply with U.S. vaccination requirements before being approved for travel.

STEP 6 — Cultural Orientation and Approval

Final Decision: If all security, medical, and eligibility criteria are met, the refugee receives final approval for admission.

Cultural Orientation: Approved refugees participate in pre-departure cultural orientation programs to prepare them for life in the U.S.

STEP 7 — Travel and Post-Arrival Processing

Travel Coordination: The International Organization for Migration (IOM) arranges transportation for refugees to the U.S. Refugees travel on loans, which they are expected to repay after resettling.

Post-Arrival Support: Once in the U.S., refugees receive assistance through government-funded resettlement programs, including: Housing, Employment services, English language classes, and school enrollment for children.

Average Processing Time: Refugee processing under USRAP typically takes **18 to 24 months** or longer. In some cases, it can extend to several years due to the extensive vetting and limited capacity of resettlement agencies.