



US to resume refugee admissions from 11 countries Trump deemed 'high risk'

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The US will resume refugee admissions from 11 countries after halting admissions from those countries last October to conduct a 90-day security review.

Senior administration officials said Monday that admissions will resume with added security screenings, including more in-depth interviews.

Donald Trump temporarily halted refugee admissions from 11 “high-risk” countries in October 2017, when he signed an executive order ending his temporary ban on refugee admissions.

Officials would not elaborate on the additional screening measures in a call with reporters, but said many of the changes will be implemented before June.

“We will be rolling out new security measures for applicants from high-risk countries which will seek to prevent the program from being exploited by terrorists, criminals and fraudsters,” US homeland security secretary Kirstjen Nielsen said Monday.

The US already has an arduous refugee referral and vetting process, which can take up to two years and involves background checks with several federal agencies, plus interviews and medical checks. No refugees admitted to the US have been implicated in a major fatal terrorist attack since the Refugee Act of 1980, according to an analysis of terrorism and immigration by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

The president has nevertheless claimed that refugees from Syria should not be admitted to the US because people fleeing the war there “may be Isis”. His administration has also slashed the number refugee admissions cap to 45,000 people – the lowest cap on record. According to an analysis by the International Rescue Committee released last week, the US is on track to resettle fewer than half that target in fiscal year 2018.

Officials would not confirm which 11 countries were the subject of the announcement, but at the end of 2016, higher-security screening was required for Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mali, North Korea, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

Ashley Houghton, tactical campaign manager at Amnesty International USA said the humanitarian group fears the impact of the screening procedures.

“Adding yet more hurdles to an already overly-bureaucratic process will burden those seeking safety for themselves and their families,” Houghton said in a statement. “Placing additional scrutiny on people based simply on what country they come from is discriminatory and arbitrary and will only leave people exposed to unimaginable violence and persecution with nowhere to turn.”