



**Issue Brief:** Syrian Refugee Crisis – Middle East Refugee Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act

**Background:** It is time for Congress to uphold its responsibility and pass legislation to help the millions of people that have been forced to flee their homes in Syria since 2011 to escape indiscriminate violence, ongoing civil war, rape, torture, and death.

The United States has only accepted 1,600 of the over 4 million registered Syrian refugees, despite having 17,000 pending Syrian refugee referrals from the United Nations Refugee Agency. By contrast, Germany has said that it will accept 800,000 refugees in 2016 (1% of Germany's population) and is willing to accept 500,000 more each year for the next few years. Jordan has provided safe harbor to half a million Syrian refugees. Nevertheless, the United States plans to only accept 10,000 Syrian refugees (0.003125% of our population) in the next fiscal year.

Fortunately, right now there is a bipartisan Congressional effort to provide more aid to both Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Senators Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Patrick Leahy (D-VT) have proposed emergency funding to help resettle tens of thousands more refugees in the U.S. and give a lifeline to refugees abandoned in camps and living in tents. The **Middle East Refugee Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act (S. 2145)** would provide \$1 billion in emergency funding to the State Department's Migration and Refugee Assistance account to respond to the refugee crisis resulting from conflict in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Iraq. The bill could potentially support the resettlement of 100,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees in the next two years.

**Why Pass the Middle East Refugee Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act:**

- It provides a crucial opportunity for the United States to take the leadership role in the international community during the largest humanitarian crisis in recent history and encourage other nations to pull their weight and responsibility;
- It provides necessary funding to support DHS capacity to streamline and conduct background security checks on pending refugee petitions;
- It provides long term benefits where refugee communities in the United States will be able to provide support and infrastructure to arriving immigrants and/or refugees;
- It provides a humanitarian and uncontroversial mechanism to address the United States humanitarian policy towards the Syrian Civil War.

From World War II to Vietnam, America has always opened its doors to those in need of safe harbor, and today should be no different. The U.S. welcomed half a million refugees from Cuba and three quarters of a million from Vietnam.

As Senator Graham stated, "I don't see how we can lead the free world and turn our back when people are seeking it. We should take the Statute of Liberty and tear it down if this is our response as a nation."

**Ask:** Please co-sponsor and pass the Middle East Refugee Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act.