



# Executive Summary

## Intergovernmental Affairs Stakeholder Engagement

April 21, 2011

### **Background**

On April 21, 2011, the Office of Public Engagement (OPE) hosted a two part national stakeholder teleconference specific to issues affecting refugees, asylees and other non-citizens. The first portion of the stakeholder call focused on the expiration of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for certain refugees and other non-citizens. This discussion was led by representatives from the Social Security Administration (SSA), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and various program offices within U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). During the second portion of this engagement, representatives from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Department of State (DOS) and multiple USCIS program offices walked stakeholders through the derivative refugee and asylee immigration process.

Below you will find an executive summary of this engagement.

### **Part I. Expiration of SSI Benefits**

Under the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), certain qualified refugees were deemed eligible to receive supplemental security income (SSI), a federal income supplement program that provides monthly assistance to low income, elderly, blind and disabled individuals. Non-citizen refugees were eligible to receive these benefits for seven years.

On January 3, 2008, Congress passed H. R. 2608, SSI Extension and Disabled Refugees Act, which amended section 402 of PRWORA. This amendment granted a two year (fiscal years 2009-2011) extension of the SSI benefit to qualified aliens, including refugees, who have made a good faith effort to pursue U.S. citizenship. It also made all individuals who have submitted an application for naturalization exempt from the seven year time limit until the end of FY 2011. As of September 30, 2011, qualified individuals that have been in the U.S. for longer than seven years and have not obtained citizenship will no longer be eligible to receive this assistance.

There are three government agencies that play a key role in raising awareness and promoting outreach in this area: the Social Security Administration, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging and

Office of Refugee Resettlement. These agencies have worked together to identify existing resources and ways to disseminate information on this topic.

As part of its efforts to assist individuals at risk of losing SSI benefits, USCIS will prioritize processing of Form N-400, Application for Naturalization, filed by individuals (1) who are within one year or less of having their SSI benefits terminated and (2) whose Form N-400 is pending for four months or more from the date of receipt. USCIS encourages SSI recipients applying for naturalization to identify within their N-400 application that they are SSI beneficiaries; this will ensure that the applications received are given priority status. In addition, USCIS seeks to expand its efforts to educate the public through the recently launched Citizenship Education and Awareness Initiative. USCIS plans to expand its outreach efforts to include individuals affected by the seven year limit on SSI benefits and provide recipients with information regarding the naturalization process and other available resources.

During the teleconference, SSA identified the means by which the agency notifies SSI recipients of the seven year time limit. The agency notifies all SSI recipients through the distribution of the following three notices:

- SSI midyear mailer notice
- Seven year suspension notice
- Nine year suspension notice

An example of each notice has been provided as an attachment to this document.

In addition, the HHS Administration on Aging provided information about its network of state and area agencies on aging, which work closely with elderly refugees and other noncitizens. HHS identified these agencies as possible ways to disseminate information regarding the expiration of SSI benefits.

This interagency collaboration has allowed for greater identification and sharing of resources and stronger working relationships with community partners, and has enabled each of the three agencies to educate stakeholders and respond to inquires regarding the expiration of SSI benefits.

## **Part II. Overview of the Derivative Refugee and Asylee Immigration Process**

During the second portion of this engagement, USCIS, DOS and CBP identified the step-by-step process a derivative refugee or asylee would follow when migrating to the United States. The process highlighted:

- Overview of the USCIS application process,
- Receipt of USCIS Approval Notice,
- Overview U.S. Embassy or Consulate interview,
- Identification of documents received prior to travel to the U.S.,
- Arrival through U.S. Port of Entry,
- Timeframe of when information is present in SAVE,
- Production of the USCIS employment authorization document, and
- Production of the Social Security Card.

Please view the attached document to see a detailed view of this process.