

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

WHO IS A REFUGEE AND HOW MANY ARE THERE?

Under international and U.S. law, a refugee is someone outside his or her own country with a well-founded fear of persecution in that country based on: (1) race; (2) religion; (3) nationality; (4) membership in a particular social group and/or (5) political opinion.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of the end of 2016 there were over 65 million refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced person—the highest number than at any time on record. Over 21 million are refugees, more than half under the age of eighteen, and 1.19 million in need of resettlement in 2017.

WHAT IS RESETTLEMENT?

Available to a very small portion of the most vulnerable refugees, resettlement provides safe haven in a third country when no other options for safety are available. Resettlement, the last of the three "durable solutions" for refugees, is only considered when refugees are neither able to return home nor be integrated into the country to which they fled. Resettlement to the U.S. is available only for those who demonstrate the greatest and most immediate need for protection and takes place after eligible refugees undergo a rigorous selection, security vetting and medical screening process.

Did you know?

Resettlement provides a life-saving solution for less than 1% percent of the world's refugees, though many more are in need.

WHO DO WE RESETTLE?

Each year, the President, after consultation with Congress, determines the processing priorities and sets an annual target number for refugee resettlement for the upcoming year. In Fiscal Year 2016, 84,995 refugees of the 85,000 target were resettled. In September 2016, a determination of 110,000 for Fiscal Year 2017 was set for refugees from around the world, with approximate regional breakdowns as follows:

- 40,000 from the Near East and South Asia
- 35,000 from Africa
- 12,000 from East Asia
- 4,000 from Europe and Central Asia
- 5,000 from Latin America and the Caribbean
- 14,000 unallocated reserve to provide flexibility in emergent situations

HISTORY OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE U.S.

The U.S. has a proud history of admitting refugees of special humanitarian concern. In the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. Congress enacted the first refugee legislation, providing refuge for over 650,000 displaced Europeans. Since refugee resettlement was codified in the Refugee Act of 1980, the U.S. has provided safety and new beginnings to over 3 million people through its public-private partnership model.

The U.S. has been a leader in refugee protection and resettlement around the world. Resettlement to the U.S. lessens the burden of refugee-hosting countries and encourages other countries to keep their borders open to refugees fleeing conflict and persecution.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AGENCIES

There are nine national U.S. refugee resettlement agencies with over 350 local offices and affiliates throughout the country that help newly arrived refugees settle into local communities. These organizations receive refugee families at the airport, help them settle into a new home, and provide case management services – including access to medical care, school enrollment, English as a Foreign Language classes, and job readiness and employment services. The services and support provided to refugees are designed to facilitate successful transition to life in the U.S. and help to attain swift self-sufficiency through employment, so refugees receive cash assistance for a very limited period.

ADMINISTRATIVE AGENCY ROLES IN THE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS

BUREAU OF POPULATION, REFUGEES, AND MIGRATION (PRM), DEPARTMENT OF STATE:

- Directs U.S. admission policies
- Coordinates the overseas processing of refugees
- Is responsible for the transportation, initial reception, and integration of refugees in the U.S.
- Administers U.S. funding to UNHCR and other overseas programs that assist refugees

U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES (USCIS), DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS):

- Refugee Officers in USCIS' Refugee Affairs Division conduct admissions interviews to determine whether refugee applicants qualify for resettlement
- Manage the security clearance process
- Adjusts status of refugees to permanent resident and citizen

OFFICE OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT (ORR), DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS):

- Administers federal funding to state and local programs that assist refugees, including social services, English language training, and employment services
- Funds and/or oversees programs for assisting unaccompanied minors, children in detention, asylum seekers, and victims of torture and trafficking

SECURITY

Extensive security checks are performed by the FBI, Department of Defense, National Counterterrorism Center, Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of State, consisting of:

- Security checks for applicants, including additional checks for certain nationalities
- Examination of biographic and biometric data
- Extensive interviews and many lines of questioning before Department of Homeland Security officials
- Medical screening
- Consultation between a broad array of law enforcement and intelligence databases, including the FBI, DHS, and the National Counterterrorism Center

Only after all checks are completed and cleared is a refugee eligible to travel to the U.S.

FACT: Since 1975, the U.S. has resettled over 3 million refugees, with annual admissions figures ranging from a high of 207,000 in 1980 to a low of 27,110 in 2002.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF REFUGEES

Resettled refugees are eager to give back to the country that has welcomed them and make significant economic and cultural contributions to their communities. Newly-arrived refugees have been the driving force behind the rejuvenation of many cities across the United States -- for example, helping to create jobs and opportunities through small-business development in once-strained rust-belt communities, and helping to reverse population decline. Those granted refuge in the U.S. successfully support their families, pay taxes, and contribute to the country in a myriad of ways. Refugees are employed in a wide range of sectors in the U.S. economy, from the hospitality and food service industry, to the teaching profession, to the fields of engineering, nursing and medicine. Many refugees give back by volunteering as interpreters or mentors to other newly-arriving refugees and immigrants. Albert Einstein, Henry Kissinger, Madeleine Albright, and Sergey Brin, the founder of Google, are former refugees whose accomplishments demonstrate what the U.S. has to gain from welcoming refugees.

More information and examples: <http://www.rcusa.org/contributions-of-refugees-to-the-us>

COMMUNITY WELCOME OF REFUGEES

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is a longstanding public-private partnership with government funding strengthened by the private resources of nonprofit agencies, community donors, and volunteers. In each city and town where refugees are resettled throughout the U.S., faith groups, neighbors, mentors, employers, businesses, community groups, philanthropies, and local organizations play an important role in helping to foster welcome for refugees every day and in assisting resettled refugees as they start their lives in their new homes and communities.

More information and examples: <http://www.rcusa.org/community-welcome-of-refugees/>