



Frequently Asked Questions About Refugee Resettlement

Who are refugees?

Refugees are men, women and children who have fled their countries of origin as a result of political instability, armed conflict, or other acts of violence. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”

What is the difference between a refugee and an immigrant?

A refugee is someone who is *forced* to leave their country as a result of a “well-founded fear of persecution.” Refugee status is determined by the United Nations. An immigrant is someone who *voluntarily* leaves their country of origin to settle in another country. This can be due to restriction or danger in their lives, economic factors, or to be close to family that previously immigrated.

What are the accepted solutions to the plight of refugees?

Most refugees hope to return to their countries of origin when conditions permit, often called “voluntary repatriation.” If voluntary repatriation is not possible due to unstable country conditions or the continued threat of persecution, some refugees are able to remain in a country of first asylum. Unfortunately, many host countries are unable to accept refugees permanently. For many refugees, resettlement in a third country, such as the United States, is the best and only alternative, although of the 26 million refugees in the world, less than 1% are resettled in a third country.

How many refugees does the United States accept for resettlement?

Traditionally each year, the President, in consultation with Congress, determines the number of refugees to be admitted into the United States. Unfortunately, the government’s commitment to refugee resettlement has been steadily eroding. The U.S. admissions levels have steadily declined in the last three decades from a high of 142,000 in 1993 to 18,000 in 2020. U.S. officials, citing unfounded fears that terrorists may infiltrate the refugee resettlement program, have called for a halt to their arrival and cuts to funding for refugee assistance.

How does a refugee qualify for resettlement in the United States?

Refugees are vetted more intensively than any other group seeking to enter the U.S. In fact, the hardest way to come to the country is as a refugee. To qualify for refugee resettlement in the United States, a person must come from a country or belong to a group designated by the U.S. Department of State. Individuals must meet the definition of a refugee by proving that he or she has a “well-founded fear of persecution.” The U.S. resettlement program gives priority to refugees, usually vulnerable families, who have been targeted by violence.

The U.S. then hand-selects every person who is admitted. U.S. government authorities, including the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Department of Defense, the State Department and the National Counterterrorism Center / U.S. Intelligence Community vet candidates thoroughly through

numerous extensive interviews, examination of biographic and biometric data, medical screenings and multiple security checks. The process can take up to 36 months.

What happens once a refugee is approved for resettlement?

Once refugees have been cleared for resettlement, the U.S. government works with the IRC and eight other national resettlement agencies to help them start their lives in America and work to become self-sufficient. Refugees may be placed in a city where they have relatives or friends, or where there's an established community that shares their language or culture. Other considerations include the cost of living and a community's ability to provide medical services. However, as legal U.S. residents, refugees may live in any state they choose.

What happens after a refugee arrives in the United States?

Refugees are usually greeted and welcomed at the airport by case workers from resettlement agencies, like the IRC, to ensure their transition is as comfortable as possible. Many refugees come to the United States without personal possessions or existing contacts. All refugees receive time-limited assistance from the U.S. government and designated non-profit organizations. Agencies are responsible for finding a suitable, affordable home for refugee families, something many of these refugees have gone without for years. Families also receive basic furnishings, food, and other immediate assistance. The IRC helps refugees acclimate to American customs and laws, secure jobs, learn English, enroll children in school, receive education about the local health care system, and become U.S. citizens. The IRC office in Wichita works with refugees over two years to help individuals with the transition from resettlement. Each year, nationally the IRC assists more than 10,000 men, women, and children to rebuild their lives in the U.S.

How are refugees supported once they arrive in the U.S.?

Refugees receive time-limited stipends to cover their first three months in the U.S., but they are encouraged to find work quickly-and most do. The IRC in Wichita reaches out to local employers, some run by former refugees or immigrants, to find job opportunities for them. Refugees can also receive support in putting together their resume and preparing for job interviews. After six months, refugees must start repaying the U.S. government for the cost of their travel to the United States.

How do refugees contribute to the U.S. economy?

Refugees are quick to find jobs for themselves and create jobs for others, contributing to the economy by paying taxes, supporting local commerce and renting or buying homes. In FY18, after being enrolled in IRC's employment program for 120 days, 69% of resettled refugees were economically self-sufficient; at 180 days, that number increased to 82%. Refugees are also starting businesses of their own, and creating jobs in the process.

How long do refugees remain in the United States?

Refugees are entitled to refugee status for one year after arrival. After one year, refugees are eligible to become a lawful permanent resident (LPR). Five years after the date of their arrival in the United States, refugees may apply for American citizenship. Each day, refugees make significant contributions to their new communities, as dedicated employees, students and parents who want the best for their children.