

REFUGEES

Refugee - someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country because they fear persecution based on one or more of the following traits: race; religion; nationality; political opinion, or; membership in a specific social group.

- ❖ In 2020, the United Nations estimated there were 26.3 million refugees worldwide. That's the highest number of people fleeing conflict since World War II.
- ❖ Historically, the U.S. was a leader in accepting refugees, having resettled more than 3 million people over the last 50 years. But the number of refugees accepted per fiscal year—called the “refugee ceiling”—is set by the president, so it can vary dramatically.
- ❖ Former President Obama had set the ceiling at 110,000 people.
- ❖ Over the course of his term, former President Trump slashed that number to just 15,000, the lowest ceiling ever.

Refugee Resettlement - an extensive process with coordination from several government agencies and non-government organizations; supposed to take 18-24 months, but can take several years

Process Steps in order:

- ❖ United Nations Screening
 - The UN determines if an individual meets the definition of a refugee and collects biographic and biometric data; at this point their spouse or minor children and join them
- ❖ Residential Support Center “Prescreening”
 - USCIS collects biographic and biometric data again and conducts several security screenings; some nationalities require clearance from law enforcement agencies; those with the ages of 14-65 undergo additional security check by the National Counterterrorism Center
- ❖ Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Interview
 - a USCIS officer interviews the applicant to determine, again, if they are eligible for resettlement. If a family is seeking protection, then all adults are interviewed, but only one must be eligible to be considered for resettlement. In addition to meeting the definition of a refugee, the applicant must qualify according to one of the processing priorities listed below.
 - Priority 1: Cases that are identified and referred to the program by U.N, a U.S. Embassy, or a designated non-governmental organization
 - Priority 2: Groups of special humanitarian concern
 - Priority 3: Family reunification cases involving spouses, unmarried children under 21, and parents of persons lawfully admitted to the United States as refugees, asylees, permanent residents (green card holders) or U.S. citizens who previously had refugee or asylum status.
- ❖ Medical screening
 - to confirm they do not have any infectious disease; done by either the International Organization for Migration or a physician designated by a U.S. Embassy

- ❖ Resettlement through the Reception and Placement (R&P) Program - offers interest free loan for travel to US but must pay back six months upon arrival
 - There are currently nine resettlement agencies part of the R&P program, with 350 local affiliates located throughout the U.S.
 - Church World Service
 - World Relief
 - Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)
 - Episcopal Migration Ministries
 - International Rescue Committee
 - Ethiopian Community Development Council
 - Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
 - U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
 - United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- ❖ Final Vetting by US Customs and Border Protection

Following Admission For Refugees

- ❖ Refugees are resettled in communities throughout the country
 - If a refugee has family members or friends in the U.S., the resettlement agency will make an effort to reunite them
 - If the refugee does not have family or friends in the U.S., they are placed where they "have the best opportunity for success," with employment and assistance from community services
- ❖ While assistance through the R&P program is only available to refugees for the first three months, refugees may seek additional assistance from the ORR
 - The ORR provides time-limited cash and medical assistance to arriving refugees along with
 - English classes
 - job readiness
 - employment services.
 - Benefits and services provided by ORR are available to refugees beyond the first eight months after their arrival
- ❖ All refugees are authorized to work in the U.S. upon their arrival
- ❖ After a year of being physically present in the U.S., refugees are required to apply for lawful permanent resident status ("green card")
- ❖ After five years as a green-card holder, refugees are eligible to apply for citizenship