

Refugee Resettlement in the United States

The United States has a proud history of welcoming refugees. In the aftermath of World War II, the US Congress enacted the first refugee legislation, providing a safe haven for more than 650,000 displaced Europeans. Since refugee resettlement was codified in the Refugee Act of 1980, the US has been a global leader, providing a new start and durable solutions for more than 3 million people through its public-private partnership model.

Who is Considered a Refugee and How Many Are There?

Under international and US law, a refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their own country who is unable to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on: race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group and/or political opinion. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 2020 there were [nearly 80 million forcibly displaced persons](#), the highest number on record. More than 26.3 million are refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18, and an estimated 1.4 million are in need of resettlement, about 5% of the global refugee population (See [Projected Global Resettlement Needs for 2021](#)). In 2020, only 22,770 refugees were resettled through UNHCR, 1.7% of the world's refugees. The number of refugees permitted to resettle in the United States reached a historic low of 18,000 in fiscal year 2020, with only 11,814 refugees arriving by the end of the year.

What is Resettlement?

Refugee resettlement provides safety and security in a third country when no other options for enduring safety are available. Resettlement, the last of the three durable solutions for refugees, is only considered when refugees are unable to return home or be integrated into the country to which they fled. Resettlement is generally available only for those who demonstrate the greatest and most immediate need for protection. The United States is one of 37 resettlement countries and has the most secure vetting process in the world. Eligible refugees undergo a rigorous screening process before they even arrive in the US (See [Refugee Resettlement Security Screening](#)).

Refugee Resettlement Agencies

There are nine national US refugee resettlement agencies with several hundred local offices and affiliates throughout the country that help newly arrived refugees rebuild their lives. These organizations welcome refugee families at the airport, prepare their first home in the US, help them enroll their children in school, learn English, acquire job readiness skills, and find employment. These services are designed to help refugees achieve self-sufficiency and a sense of belonging in their new homes (See [Refugee Integration and Economic Contributions](#)).

Administrative Agencies Involved in the Refugee Resettlement Process

- The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), US Department of State

PRM directs US admission policies; coordinates overseas processing, is responsible for the transportation and initial reception of refugees in the US and administers US funding to UNHCR and other overseas programs that assist refugees.

The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), US Department of Homeland Security:

Highly trained USCIS officers conduct admissions interviews to determine whether refugee applicants qualify for resettlement, manage the security clearance process, and process applications for refugees to adjust their status to permanent residents and citizens.

Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), US, Department of Health and Human Services:

ORR administers federal funding to state and local programs that provide refugee resettlement services. It also funds and oversees programs for other populations of concern, including unaccompanied refugee minors, unaccompanied migrating children, asylees, Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) recipients, Cuban and Haitian entrants and victims of torture and trafficking.