

Refugee Resettlement in the United States

The United States has a proud history of welcoming refugees. In the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. law, a refugee is someone outside his or her 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), at the end of 2017 there were over 68.5 million forcibly displaced persons, the highest number on record. More than 25.4 million are refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18, and an estimated 1.4 million are in need of resettlement in 2019, about 5% of the global refugee population (See **Global Region-by-Region Resettlement Needs for 2019**). Recently, less than 1 percent of the world's refugees are being resettled annually, and the number permitted to enter the U.S. has reached a historic low of 30,000.

What is Resettlement?

Refugee 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 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 U.S. (See **Refugee Resettlement Security Screening**).

Refugee Resettlement Agencies

There are nine national U.S. 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 U.S., 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, U.S. Department of State

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

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. 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, U.S., 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.