



MIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICES

REFUGEE FACTS

Who are “refugees”?

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines a “refugee” as a person who has fled his or her country of nationality (or habitual residence) and who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of a “well-founded” fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. This definition of a “refugee” excludes those who have left their homes only to seek a more prosperous life.

What happens to refugees as they flee persecution?

Many refugees are forced to leave their homes without warning and cannot even bring basic necessities with them. When these individuals flee, they try to get to a country where they will be allowed to stay until they are allowed to migrate as a refugee. Only half of those who flee make it to a refugee camp alive. Once the individual reaches the refugee camp, he or she is often placed in an overcrowded and under-supplied camp and exposed to disease, crime, and other harsh conditions. The individual usually stays in the camp until the United States or another country accepts his/her application for residency. The wait for acceptance ranges from one month to over twenty. Only ½ -1 percent of those who apply for refugee status are actually approved for resettlement in a third country.

How does a refugee become a refugee?

The process for proving “refugee” status is often very difficult. The asylum seeker must first meet the refugee definition and requirements established by the government of the first asylum country (the nearby country to which the person goes when he or she escapes from his or her home country). If these criteria are met, the refugee is placed on a list of individuals eligible for resettlement. Then, the countries that accept refugees for resettlement examine the lists of individuals and determine if any of these individuals meet their own criteria for resettlement. This process can take a long time; even after a refugee is accepted as eligible for resettlement, there is often a very long wait for an available slot in the country that has accepted his or her application.

What are the options for refugee resettlement?

1. Repatriation: Most refugees would prefer to return to their country of origin. They are allowed to return only if conditions stabilize enough so that their safety is guaranteed upon return.
2. Nationalization: The second option for refugees is to remain in their host country or “country of first asylum” (a country near to their country of origin). However, host countries often become overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of refugees arriving and are often unable to permanently support them and therefore, are unable to offer the option of nationalization.
3. Resettlement: The last option is for refugees to resettle in a third country, usually the U.S. or Western Europe. This is the least preferable option as far as the welfare of these individuals is concerned because it brings refugees into a different environment far away from their homelands.

How many refugees resettle in the U.S. each year?

Every year, the President consults with Congress and determines the ceiling for refugee admissions. For FY 2015, the US agreed to resettle 70,000 refugees. Worldwide, there are now 60 million people who are refugees, displaced, or seeking asylum. This is one in every 122 people worldwide.



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Who processes the refugee applications in the United States?

The acceptance of individuals for resettlement in the United States is the responsibility of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Once DHS has approved a case for resettlement, responsibility passes to the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) of the U.S. Department of State. The State Department oversees programs abroad to prepare refugees for their arrival in the U.S. as well as the allocation of funds and placement of refugees with Voluntary Agencies (VOLAGS) for refugee reception and placement within the U.S. Generally, the State Department contracts with national VOLAG's to resettle refugees in various locations and ensure that immediate survival needs are met and to provide services that will enable the refugees to achieve financial self-sufficiency as rapidly as possible. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) is one such VOLAG.

What are the responsibilities of the U.S. concerning refugees?

Besides moral concern for the safety of fellow human beings, as a signatory of the United Nations Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, the U.S. is legally obligated to provide for the safety of refugees. As such, the U.S. is obligated to uphold the rights of refugees including basic civil rights, as well as the rights to asylum, access to medical care, education, and employment. In order to fulfill this obligation, refugees in the U.S. are eligible for food stamps, low income housing, and educational services.

Are refugees “legal?”

Yes, refugees are screened and approved by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of State for resettlement in communities throughout the United States. They are fully “legal” (documented) and are only accepted for resettlement in the U.S. because their very lives, and those of their families, are in danger in their homelands. Refugees arrive in America with no material belongings apart from the clothes on their backs yet they come full of enthusiasm and hope for new lives in America. Refugee resettlement is a State Department mandate and a community initiative.

What are the responsibilities of refugees in the US?

Refugees must obey all the laws and regulations of the country in which they reside. In the United States, refugees pay income tax and pay into Social Security.

How do refugees end up in Northern Virginia?

Catholic Charities Diocese of Arlington, Office of Migration and Refugee Services is an affiliate of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB MRS). The USCCB serves as the public policy agency of the Catholic Bishops in their service to the Church in this country by “uniting the people of God where voluntary collective action on a broad inter-diocesan level is needed.” In addition, the USCCB coordinates the social justice concerns of the Church at the national or “inter-diocesan” level. The Office of Migration and Refugee Services is an office of USCCB. It works closely with U.S. government agencies such as the Department of State, Department of Labor, Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Homeland Security. USCCB conducts most of its resettlement operations through the more than 80 affiliated diocesan resettlement offices throughout the U.S.

How many refugees does CCDMRS assist every year? From where do they come?

In 2014, CCDMRS assisted more than 1,000 refugee and asylee clients from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burma, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, and Sudan.



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All the different terms for immigrants can be confusing!

Here are a few simple definitions to help you determine the differences.

Refugee

A person outside of the United States who seeks protection on the grounds that he or she fears persecution in his or her homeland - To attain refugee status, the person must prove that he or she has a “well-founded fear of persecution” on the basis of at least one of five internationally recognized grounds. Those include the person’s (1) race, (2) religion, (3) membership in a social group, (4) political opinion, or (5) national origin. Refugees generally apply in refugee camps or at designated processing sites outside their home countries. In some instances, refugees may apply for protection within their home countries. If accepted as a refugee, the person is sent to the U.S. with permission to stay and receives assistance through the Refugee Resettlement Program.

Asylee

A person who has already entered the United States, and who fears persecution if sent back to his or her country, may apply for asylum here. Like a refugee, an asylum applicant must prove that he has a “well-founded fear of persecution” based on the same grounds.



Immigrant

An immigrant is a foreign-born individual who has been admitted to reside permanently in the United States as a legal permanent resident (LPR) or “green card” holder. Typically, a foreign-born individual seeking to become an LPR chooses to leave his or her country for economic or family reunification reasons. Application can be made through two programs:

- (1) family-sponsored immigration and
- (2) employment based immigration

Unaccompanied Minor

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines unaccompanied refugee minors (URM) as children who are separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible to do so. In the Resettlement Program, URMs are children under age 18 who are resettled alone in the United States, without a parent or relative able to care for them.

Naturalization

Lawful permanent residents are eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship through a process called Naturalization. To qualify, applicants must reside in the U.S. for 5 years; demonstrate knowledge of U.S. history and government; show they have paid taxes; have committed no serious crimes; and demonstrate that they understand, speak, and write English.

Illegal Alien/Undocumented Immigrant

An illegal alien is the same as an undocumented immigrant, a person who is present in the United States without the permission of the U.S. government. Undocumented immigrants enter either: (1) illegally without inspection or with false documents or (2) legally with a temporary visa and then remain in the US beyond the expiration of the visa. Four out of ten undocumented immigrants enter the U.S. legally.



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A REFUGEE'S JOURNEY TO NORTHERN VIRGINIA

Refugee Flees Homeland due to “well-founded” fear for his/her life
(Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, etc.)



United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees considers:
Repatriation (refugee to be sent back to mother country)
Nationalization (refugee to stay in the country to which they fled)
Third Country Asylum or Resettlement (less than 1 percent of refugee population)



U.S. Department of State/Department of Homeland Security
Conducts interview at a Migration Processing Center with refugee
to determine resettlement eligibility for resettlement and to for clearance to ensure that the individual does
not pose a security risk to the United States



Allocation to Domestic Resettlement Agency
United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, Office of Migration and Refugee Services
(USCCB MRS)



Allocation to Resettlement Site
Catholic Charities Diocese of Arlington, Office of Migration and Refugee Services (CCDA MRS)



Refugee Notified of Resettlement Site in the U.S..
Refugee prepares to enter last stage of processing before arrival in U.S. –
medical examination, processing, other clearance checks.
If there are medical complications, they are put on medical hold.



Processing Completed
Flight Booked. CCDA MRS notified of the date of arrival. Usually given 1-2 weeks notice.



CCDA MRS Prepares for Arrival of Refugee
CCDA MRS Associate Director assigns caseworker to the case
Volunteer Coordinator assigns mentors to the family
If present, co-sponsor is notified of pending arrival of refugee
Housing is secured, donated furniture and household items are collected and placed in house; kitchen is
stocked with culturally appropriate food staples



Refugee(s) Arrive in Northern Virginia
Caseworker and family sponsor greet refugee(s) at National or Dulles airport.
Bring them to their new home.