

# Refugee Processing Guide

Office of Minority Health



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SUMMIT COUNTY OFFICE OF MINORITY HEALTH

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# What is a Refugee?



Legal Definition: “ An individual(s) outside of his or her country of nationality or habitual residence who is unable or unwilling to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on his or her race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.” The term refugee denotes a specific legal status declared prior to arrival in their new country of residence. <sup>1</sup> A refugee is not...

- 1) Immigrant (Migrant)- An immigrant is classified as a person who makes a willing decision or choice to enter a new country of residence. Reasons for immigrating may include but are not limited to education, employment, or marriage.
- 2) Asylee- Like a refugee, the individual must have well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or political opinion. However, an asylee does not have a declared legal status and usually announces their need for asylum after they have arrived to their new country or at a port of entry.
- 3) Internally Displaced Person (IDP)- An individual(s) who have fled their homes but not their country of origin. Many internally displaced people are unable to live quality and safe lives in their home countries. They are at risk for violence and other adverse situations.

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<sup>1</sup> (United Nations High Commission of Refugees, 2017)

Examples:

- 1) Immigrant- Xiao, a young Chinese national, is very interested in technology and informatics. However, Xiao does not feel he has a good professional future or job success. He has heard many good things about Silicon Valley and start-up companies. Since there are better opportunities there for him to learn and work, Xiao chooses to move to California. He is not forced to go nor does he feel he cannot return to China if he is unsuccessful finding a job.
- 2) Refugee- Hala comes from Syria. For many years, she loved her home country and felt very happy as a university student. She was studying to become a doctor until the Syrian Civil War broke out. Her father was killed because he was a journalist speaking out against the current leadership. Her mother is afraid that the rest of the family will be attacked as well. After many months of interviews, background checks, and gathering documents, her family has been awarded refugee status and can now go to America.
- 3) Asylee- Winston is originally from Nigeria. He takes a vacation to the United States but upon his arrival to LAX airport, Winston tells an airport official that he cannot go back to Nigeria because he may be imprisoned upon his return for being gay. Since there are known laws in regarding imprisonment for homosexual acts, Winston can begin his application for refugee status.
- 4) Internally Displaced Person (IDP)- After Hurricane Katrina, many residents of New Orleans were internally displaced from their homes and lives. While many left Louisiana, they are not considered refugees because they still remained in their home country of the United States.

## Application Process

To apply for refugee status to the United States, the following occurs in a step by step process<sup>2</sup>.

- 1) Registration and Data Collection- Individuals applying for refugee status will begin their application process, usually through the United Nations High Commission of Refugees. This group sends biographical information of each applicant to a Refugee Support Center (RSC). Applicants can also directly apply for refugee status through a RSC. All this information about an applicant and his or her family goes into the Department of State's Worldwide Refugee Admission Processing System (WRAPS). The WRAPS database cross-checks information and sends this to US Security agencies.

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<sup>2</sup> (United States Department of State , 2017)

- 2) Security Check- The National Counterterrorism Terrorism Center, FBI, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of State, along with other intelligence agencies, will screen applicant with the data they received from the RSCs. During this screening process, applicants are checked for connections with terrorist groups and individual terrorists, individuals with past immigration violations, or criminal history. Syrian refugees are subject to advanced reviews.
- 3) DHS Interview- All security screenings are sent to the DHS and State Department. Agents from the DHS will review the initial screening results and will host an interview with the applicant. They will also collect biometric data of applicants. If there are any discrepancies between the responses from the in-person interview and any information in the WRAPS database, the case will immediately be put on hold until all inconsistencies are resolved.
- 4) Biometric Security Checks- Fingerprints of applicants will be collected in the DHS systems and compared to the FBI Biometric database, the DHS Biometric Database, and DOD database. Any issues with the results of the biometric results will result in the cancellation of the application.
- 5) Medical Check- All applicants will undergo medical and health screenings. Specific illnesses and infectious diseases can result in the cancellation of the refugee application. The results will be stored in the WRAPS database.
- 6) Cultural Orientation- Applicants who have passed all background checks, interviews, biometrics, and the medical checks will attend a cultural orientation about the United States.
- 7) Assignment to Domestic Resettlement Locations and Travel-Based on information provided the WRAPS program, RSCs will review the information and decide which state and city refugees will relocate to. Then, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) makes the travel arrangements. Before arrival, applicants will undergo more security screenings from the U.S. Customs, Border Protections, and the Transportation Security Administration for Secure Flight Program. Any applicant without concerns will be allowed to continue their resettlement process.
- 8) Arrival in the U.S- Refugee resettlement agencies will arrive to the airports to welcome refugees at the airport and begin the refugee case management period.

## Unaccompanied Minors and Special Immigrant Visas



Photo Credit: "Underaged Iraq IDP Crisis in Mosul, Northern Iraq, Western Asia, " Mstyslav Chernov, November 28, 2016

The Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) branch of the UNHCR works to reunite children with family members after separation. However, if the child does not have living relatives or it is not in the best interest of the child to be placed with their family, these children may be resettled into a third country, such as the United States. The children may be placed in a foster home upon arrival.<sup>3</sup>

Though they do not receive the same classification as refugees, translators for the U.S. Armed Forces from countries like Afghanistan and Iraq can receive a Special Immigrant Visa. Applicants who are eligible can file petition through the UCIS, prepare their Visa application through interviews and background checks. Special Immigrant Visa holders are entitled to resettlement benefits. Only fifty visas are awarded each year and applicants must follow all steps, provide all forms, and pay all fees when requested. For more information, visit

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<sup>3</sup> (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2017)

<https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/immigrate/iraqi-afghan-translator.html#step1> and consult the appendix of the Resource Guide to see the forms required.<sup>4</sup>

## Medical Screenings



Prior to their arrival to the United States, all refugees are required to undergo medical screenings as part of their application process. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Division of Global Migration and Quarantine develops the Technical Instructions for the examination. There are specific conditions, **Class A** which can cancel an application.<sup>5</sup>

- Active Tuberculosis
- Syphilis
- Other sexually transmitted diseases
- Hansen's Disease (Leprosy)
- Drug Addiction
- Physical or mental health conditions in which the individual is a serious harm to themselves or others.
- Cholera
- Diphtheria
- Plague

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<sup>4</sup> (United States Department of State, 2017)

<sup>5</sup> (Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center, 2011)

- Polio
- Smallpox
- Yellow fever
- Viral hemorrhagic fevers
- Severe acute respiratory syndromes
- Influenza caused by novel or re-emergent influenza (pandemic flu)

Some applicants with Class A conditions may not have their application canceled outright if they demonstrate they are receiving treatment and are not harmful to others. Applicants with Class A conditions may also be eligible for special waivers but in rare circumstances.<sup>5</sup>

**Class B** conditions are classified as physical or mental health conditions, diseases, or disability serious in degree or permanent in nature. However, these conditions do not make applicants ineligible for travel. Their conditions will make an impact on their quality of life and will require extensive medical treatment or institutionalization.<sup>6</sup>

- HIV
- Latent Tuberculosis
- Any condition not listed above

Individuals with Class B conditions and will require immediate follow-up after arrival to the United States.<sup>5</sup>



All U.S. Bound refugees receive the following vaccines<sup>7</sup>

- HepB-Hepatitis B vaccine
- Rotavirus-Rotavirus infection vaccine
- Hib-Haemophilus Influenzae Type B vaccine
- PCV-13-Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine
- DTP-Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTaP) vaccine.
- Polio-Inactive Polio vaccine.

<sup>6</sup> (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2017)

<sup>7</sup> (Centers of Disease Control and Prevention Division of Global Migration and Quarantine, 2016)



- Td-Tetanus Diphtheria vaccine
- MMR-Measles, Mumps, and Rubella vaccine

## Resettlement Process

While not all refugee resettlement agencies are the same, there is a common process of how refugee resettlement agencies assist families.<sup>8</sup>

- 1) Find and secure housing based on family information provided by the UCIS. The apartment is furnished by items donated to the refugee resettlement agency or through local stores.
- 2) Arrive to airport to welcome refugees to the United States and transport them to their new home.
- 3) Home orientation and introduction to living in apartments, apartment owner,
- 4) Invite and make sure refugees come for a welcoming dinner hosted by the agency. Some of these dinners have foods native to the refugees' country of origin.
- 5) Refugee resettlement agencies will assist refugee families with under-aged children enroll into school.
- 6) Help connect refugees with special resources such as libraries, grocery stores, or places of worship.
- 7) Take refugees to social services offices to apply for public assistance and or social security cards.
- 8) Assist registering adult men (18-26) for U.S. Selective Service
- 9) Applying for SSI benefits for adults over 65 and older or disabled.
- 10) Assist refugees with finding immediate employment.
- 11) Enroll clients into English classes
- 12) Refer refugees for initial arrival medical screening. Refugees with Class B conditions will need immediate screening.
- 13) Enroll refugees in a cultural orientation, separate from the one they may have received before. Depending on the agency's resources, the orientation may range from a few days to a week. Topics included in the cultural orientation include, but are not limited to\*:
  - a. Resettlement and Path to Citizenship
  - b. Personal and Home Safety
  - c. Getting Around
  - d. Health and Wellness

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<sup>8</sup> (International Institute of Akron, 2014)

- e. Survive and Thrive
  - i. Housing
  - ii. Public Assistance
  - iii. Employment
  - iv. Personal Finance
  - v. Your New Community

\*These topics were selected from local Akron refugee resettlement agencies. Topics may vary per agency.

## Post 90-Day Resettlement

After 90 days, refugees will be expected to independently using services they have been referred to through the refugee resettlement agencies. However, refugees are welcome to still attend open office hours or contact a case manager for advice and referrals. Refugees enrolled when Refugee Social Services Program (RSSP) are eligible for specific employment services.<sup>8</sup> Those enrolled in the RSSP are eligible up to five years of assistance after their arrival date. If a refugee has a disability or condition which prevents him or her from gaining employment or schooling, the refugee resettlement agency will assist the individual by creating a specialized financial self-sufficiency plan along with getting appropriate medical services (includes mental health services).

Refugees are expected to make their own appointment, communicate with governmental agencies, and other service providers after their 90 day case management. Refugees will also pay back the IOM, who arranged travel to the United States, six months after their arrival.<sup>8</sup>

## Refugee Resettlement Challenges



Photo Credit: "Afghan Girl"-Steve McCurry, June 1985, National Geographic

Though refugees may have a lot of resources and assistance at their disposal, many refugees have trouble utilizing their help and support. Refugees face numerous challenges that other Americans are not facing.<sup>9</sup>

- 1) Social and Familial Adjustments- Many refugees feel as soon as they arrive to the United States, they must see to finding appropriate housing, employment, enrolling children into school, learning English, and making childcare arrangements. Families with multiple generations in the house will go through major adjustments since both adult men and women will be working. Elderly refugees may feel isolated since they are at home unattended or children will have to be minded in settings like daycares. The cultural dynamics of gender roles may change if women become the primary breadwinners.
- 2) Competing Demands - Most refugee families will have multiple appointments to keep in a day from arriving to social services office, finding employment, going to English classes, learning, or going to medical appointments. Some appointments may take long periods of time, awaiting transportation, and ensuring they are on time for things like school and work can result in refugees missing appointments or not being well prepared for specific appointments.
- 3) Language and Cultural Barriers- Many refugees, especially if they come from rural areas in their country of origin, may never have been exposed to English or some aspects of American culture (through TV or Internet). While children can learn quickly, older children and adults may struggle with reading, writing, and speaking English. This can be especially challenging for individuals whose native languages do not use a Latin-based alphabet. Refugee resettlement agencies also point out those individuals who have not previously learned to read or write in their own language have even more challenges to overcome since they are unable to read instructions or lesson plans printed in their own language.
- 4) Undiagnosed Health Conditions- Many people may associate refugees with bringing disease and infection with them but most refugees are healthy when they arrive or are not a danger to others with their health. However, there are some refugees who may have undiagnosed chronic diseases such as diabetes. In developing nations, there may not be enough resources to provide state of the art medical devices and tools to make clear diagnoses. Or, most health infrastructure is completely unraveled by conflict or natural disaster. Based on the urgency of trying to resettle, most refugees remain undiagnosed for long times with specific chronic health conditions.

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<sup>9</sup> (Jackson, et al., 2016)

- 5) Triple Trauma Paradigm- Refugees undergo an enormous amount of mental health trauma but receive this trauma in three steps. This results in the “Triple Trauma Paradigm”.
- a. The first case of trauma refugees are exposed to is the trauma faced in the country of origin. Refugees have discussed seeing the deaths of loved ones and friends, familiar places destroyed, and being separated from families and friends. Some may have personally been tortured (physically or mentally) and or raped during the conflict.
  - b. The second case of trauma refugees are exposed to is when the refugees settle in their first-asylum nation, usually a neighboring country. Most refugees are forced to reside in refugee camps. These camps are usually not well financed or supplied. Conditions of these camps are usually dirty and unsafe. Individuals are forced to live in tiny and cramped tents or small huts. Water and general sanitation is highly limited. Women are especially at risk for sexual assault and abuse.
  - c. The third case of trauma arises after resettlement into their new country of residence. Many refugees still have not addressed the previous traumas they underwent, they may feel survivor’s guilt, and stress from learning a new life and culture.

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