Overview of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

HIAS

**Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.**

What is the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program?

Since its founding, the United States has offered safety and the hope of a new life to refugees fleeing violence and persecution. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) continues that legacy—it is a sophisticated humanitarian program designed to admit certain eligible refugees, set them up to quickly become self-sufficient, and enable them to restart their lives in safety.

Who is eligible for refugee resettlement?

A refugee is someone who has fled his or her home country and cannot return because he or she has a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Of the more than 60 million displaced people around the world, 19.5 million are considered refugees. Most of those nearly 20 million people will have no choice but to remain in the country to which they first fled. Some might eventually be able to return home. The United Nations' refugee agency, UNHCR, estimates that only one percent of the world's refugees will ever be able to resettle in a third country.

The U.S. historically has accepted more refugees for resettlement than any other country in the world. Each year, the President recommends a number of refugees that the United States will seek to admit. In 2015, that number was 70,000, and next year it is set at 85,000. In the past, refugee admissions to the U.S. have been as high as 207,000 in 1980 (to admit refugees from Vietnam) and as low as 27,000 in 2002 (when admissions plummeted after the September 11 attacks). HIAS believes that this year, in response to a global refugee crisis larger than any since World War II, the U.S. should dramatically increase the number of people that we are resettling.

Where do the refugees get resettled?

The USRAP is administered through a public-private partnership between several U.S. government agencies and nine non-profit organizations (including HIAS), called "voluntary agencies," with some 315 affiliated offices in about 180 communities across the country. After the refugees are processed, selected for resettlement, screened, and admitted to the U.S., they are welcomed by one of the voluntary agencies, which helps them to get settled in their new community. Refugees with relatives in the United States are likely to be resettled with or near them. Refugees who have no family in the U.S. are "sponsored" by the resettlement agency, which decides on the best match between a community's resources and the refugee's needs. Factors considered during the placement process include the refugee's health, age and family makeup. Cost-of-living is another major factor in determining suitable locations for refugee resettlement.

What precautions are taken to ensure arriving refugees are not a security threat to the United States?

The USRAP is the most difficult way to legally enter the United States—no other individuals arriving in the U.S. (students, tourists, etc.) are screened as thoroughly as refugees. All refugees undergo rigorous security screenings prior to arriving in the U.S., including multiple biographic and identity investigations; in-depth, in-person interviews by specialized and well-trained Department of Homeland Security officers; medical screenings; and other checks by U.S. domestic and international intelligence agencies. The U.S. government uses every mechanism at its disposal to uncover any information it may have on an applicant or an applicant's family member. If any facts presented in these screenings are problematic, the application is not approved or is put on hold. Additionally, DHS officers have the power of discretional denial, meaning even if a case passes all security checks, DHS has the authority to deny the case based on the interview. Processing times for refugee resettlement average 18-24 months from the time of referral to the USRAP to arrival in the U.S. When combined with a prerequisite referral process, resettlement can take between 3 to 4 years for a normal priority case.

What support is provided to refugees?

Upon arrival in their new location, the resettlement agencies provide services such as meeting the refugees at the airport, preparing their housing arrangements, helping refugees find English classes, medical care, social services, and registering children for school. The USRAP model is built on the principle of self-sufficiency, and one of the biggest priorities for resettlement agencies is finding employment (often entry-level) for the refugee. Each refugee is given $1,875—much of which is used in setting up the apartment and paying for rent, food, and clothing in the first few months. Over time, refugees move into better jobs, pay taxes, purchase goods and services, and strengthen the local economy – all the while both contributing the United States of America and rebuilding their own lives in safety and with dignity.