

Frequently Asked Questions about Refugees



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Who are refugees?

Refugees are people who legally enter the United States because they “cannot return to their home country due to a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.”
(Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service)

How do refugees come to the United States?

Individuals apply for refugee status to the United States through a United Nations-run refugee camp or US Embassy. After 2-3 years of thorough review of their application by the Department of Homeland Security, Health and Human Services and Overseas Processing Entities, these individuals may be approved for refugee status. Every year in October the President of the United States, in consultation with Congress, sets the ceiling for refugee admission to the US for the fiscal year.

How do refugees come to Nebraska?

Once approved for refugee status, refugees come to the United States through voluntary agencies (VOLAGS) who partner directly with the Department of State. These VOLAGS have affiliate offices, such as Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska's refugee services program, in cities across the nation.

The VOLAGS assign refugees to affiliate offices in local areas based on several factors:

- Reunification of family members,
- Community's capacity to work with certain ethnic minorities,
- Costs of living, and
- Employment opportunities

Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska's refugee services program is affiliated with two VOLAGS: Church World Service and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.

How does Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska's refugee services program assist a refugee with local resettlement?

- Secure housing
- Set up housing with furniture and other basic necessities, including food
- Meet and greet refugees upon arrival at the airport
- Provide safety orientation
- Conduct intake and cultural orientation to new community
- Assist families with applying for public benefits
- Assist them in getting a social security card
- Assist them with getting basic medical services, including blood work, immunizations and physical exams
- Assist children in enrolling in school
- Assist adults with access to English as a Second Language classes
- Assist and enroll adults in employment search programs

These services are provided during the “reception and placement” period which is 30-90 days depending on the needs of the refugee.

What public benefits do refugees receive?

Refugees are eligible for certain public benefits based upon their US approved status as a refugee. Refugee cash assistance is designed for single adult refugees and couples with no children. It provides monthly cash assistance and Medicaid for up to 8 months as well as food stamps. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits are for refugee families that meet certain qualifications and provide the same benefits as cash assistance.

How do refugees find employment?

Refugees are fully authorized to work in the United States upon receipt of their social security card and a state identification card. Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska’s refugee services program has two full-time Employment Specialists who assist refugees with all elements of finding employment, including:

- Orientation to the US job market,
- Assistance with resumes,
- Completion of applications,
- Transportation to interviews, and
- Orientation to a new job

Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska’s refugee services program Employment Specialists have relationships with over 40 local employers who hire refugees regularly.

How long is someone a refugee?

A refugee holds refugee status for a one-year period at which time they are required to adjust their status to Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR). Refugees can maintain this LPR status as long as they wish. After five years of LPR status, refugees are eligible to apply for US Citizenship.

How many refugees are in Nebraska?

Over the past several years, primary refugee resettlement in Nebraska has totaled less than 1,000 refugees per year. The larger impact in the State has been through what is known as “secondary migration.” Secondary migrants are refugees who have been primarily resettled in one city or state and then voluntarily relocated to another city or state. While the refugees that are resettled through affiliate agencies are easily counted, secondary migrant numbers are more difficult to estimate. Therefore, the official number of refugees in the State of Nebraska is unknown.

*We invite you to support the work of Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska.
For more information about helping or supporting refugees,
call (402) 346-6100 or email kthomas@lfsneb.org*