

## How does the U.S. refugee resettlement process work?

The Refugee Admissions Program is jointly administered by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) in the Department of State, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and offices within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) within DHS conducts refugee interviews and determines individual eligibility for refugee status in the United States.

There are [three principal categories](#) for classifying refugees under the U.S. refugee program:

- **Priority One.** Individuals with compelling persecution needs or those for whom no other durable solution exists. These individuals are referred to the United States by UNHCR, or they are identified by a U.S. embassy or a non-governmental organization (NGO).
- **Priority Two.** Groups of “special concern” to the United States, which are selected by the Department of State with input from USCIS, UNHCR, and designated NGOs. Currently, the groups include certain persons from the former Soviet Union, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Iran, Burma, and Bhutan.
- **Priority Three.** The relatives of refugees (parents, spouses, and unmarried children under 21) who are already settled in the United States may be admitted as refugees. The U.S.-based relative must file an Affidavit of Relationship (AOR) and must be processed by DHS.

Before admission to the United States, each refugee must undergo an extensive interviewing, screening, and security clearance process conducted by regional refugee coordinators and overseas Resettlement Support Centers (RSCs). To qualify, individuals generally must not already be firmly resettled in any other country. Not everyone who falls into the three preceding categories is admitted to the United States.

- The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) requires most prospective refugees to prove their individual case of “well-founded fear,” regardless of the person’s country, circumstance, or classification in a priority category.
- Refugees are subject to the grounds of exclusion listed in Section 212(a) of the INA, including health-related grounds, moral/criminal grounds, and security grounds. They may also be excluded for polygamy, misrepresentation of facts on visa applications, smuggling, and previous deportations. Waivers exist for certain grounds of exclusion.
- After a refugee has been conditionally accepted for resettlement, the RSC sends a request for assurance of placement to the United States, and the Refugee Processing Center (RPC) works with [private voluntary agencies](#) (VOLAGs) to determine where the refugee will live. Refugees resettled in the United States do not need to have a U.S. sponsor. If a refugee approved for admission does have a relative living in the United States, every effort will be made to place the refugee near his or her relative.
- If a person is accepted as a refugee for admission to the United States, it is conditioned upon the individual passing a medical examination and all security checks.
- According to a [Human Rights First](#) report, the processing times of the U.S. refugee resettlement program “can be quite prolonged, leaving some refugees stranded in dangerous locations or in difficult circumstances.” According to the [Department of State](#) the entire process can take an

average of 18–24 months to complete. These issues have improved in recent years; in a 2014 report, the [Obama Administration](#) cited “interagency coordination and processing procedures” as one of the reasons for increased admissions.

- Once this assurance of placement has been secured and medical examinations and security checks have been completed, RSCs work together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to schedule and arrange refugee travel to the United States.
- Before departing, refugees sign a promissory note to repay the United States for their travel costs. This travel loan is an interest-free loan that refugees begin to pay back six months after arriving in the country.
- Upon receipt of the IOM travel notification, the VOLAG arranges for the reception of refugees at the airport and transportation to their housing at their final destination.

### **What happens once refugees arrive?**

- A VOLAG is responsible for ensuring that most services are provided during the refugee’s first 90 days in the United States. It arranges for food, housing, clothing, employment counseling, medical care, and other necessities.
- One year after admission, a refugee may apply for Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) status. If they adjusted to LPR status, they may petition for naturalization five years after their arrival in the United States.
- In [FY 2014](#), new refugee arrivals went to 46 states. Top recipient states were California (3,068), Michigan (2,753), Texas (2,462), Illinois (1,064), and Arizona (973).
- Refugees are expected to have a job within six months of arrival. Refugee men who have recently arrived are employed at a [higher rate](#) than native born (67% to 60% respectively), and refugee women are employed at the same rate as native women.

Source: <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/refugees-fact-sheet>

Source: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/11/20/infographic-screening-process-refugee-entry-united-states>