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**Refugee Resettlement Program Information**

**Who is a refugee?**

A refugee is a person who has been forced to flee their homeland because of persecution, violence, conflict, or war. The legal definitions of “refugee” all trace their origins back to the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, or the “Geneva Convention,” which was crafted following the enormous refugee crisis caused by World War II.

The Geneva Convention uses the word “refugee” to describe an individual who:

*“...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

When refugees flee their homelands, they cross an international border and seek safety in another country, where they can seek out support and protection from the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR). The UNHCR registers them, interviews them to make sure that they have a legitimate claim to being a refugee, and, if they do have a legitimate claim, confers on them refugee status.

We often say that “refugee” isn’t who someone is, it’s something that has happened to them. At the end of the day, refugees are human beings: mothers and fathers, sons and daughters; teachers, farmers, engineers, doctors; friends and neighbors. Refugees are people just like you and me: ordinary people who have been caught up in extraordinary, and harrowing, circumstances.

**Durable solutions**

After an individual receives official refugee status from the UNHCR, the UNHCR is charged with finding what is called a “durable solution” to their situation. There are three durable solutions that will allow the refugee to rebuild his or her life in peace and dignity:

* Voluntary repatriation to his/her home country: a refugee can return home once it is safe to do so
* Local integration into the country of first asylum: the country where the refugee has found safety could provide a pathway to legal residence and citizenship
* Resettlement to a third country

Resettlement is the third and last option for any refugee, when it is not possible for the refugee to return home or to integrate into the country which first offered asylum. Resettlement is a long and arduous process, an opportunity available to only a tiny fraction of refugees. In fact, less than one half of 1% of refugees will ever be resettled.

**Referral for Resettlement**

Not every refugee will be eligible for resettlement; in fact, less than 1% of all refugees will ever be resettled. Refugees are referred for resettlement if they cannot go home, and cannot integrate into the country that is providing them asylum.

There are seven categories (or criteria) used by UNHCR to select refugees for resettlement.

They include:

* **Legal and/or Physical Protection Needs** of the refugee in the country of refuge (this includes a threat of *refoulement,* or threat of being returned to one’s persecutor)
* **Survivors of Torture and/or Violence**, where repatriation or the conditions of asylum could result in further traumatization and/or heightened risk, or where appropriate treatment is not available
* **Medical Needs**, in particular life-saving treatment that is unavailable in the country of refuge
* **Women and Girls at Risk**, who have protection problems particular to their gender
* **Family Reunification**, when resettlement is the only means to reunite refugee family members who, owing to refugee flight or displacement, are separated by borders or entire continents
* **Children and Adolescents at Risk**, where a best interests determination supports resettlement, and
* **Lack of Foreseeable Alternative Durable Solutions**, which generally is relevant only when other solutions are not feasible in the foreseeable future, when resettlement can be used strategically, and/or when it can open possibilities for comprehensive solutions

Twenty-seven countries[[2]](#footnote-2) participate in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees resettlement program and welcome refugees on an annual basis. The United States of America has long been the international leader in refugee resettlement, living into our country’s highest ideals of freedom and liberty for all people.

**The United States Resettlement Program**

The U.S. resettlement program, known as the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), is based in a strong model of public-private partnership. Within the federal government, the USRAP is an interagency effort involving many departments, including the Department of State and Department of Health and Human Services for refugee services, and the Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice (FBI), Department of Defense, and National Counterterrorism Center for the security screening of refugees. Once refugees have cleared the security screenings and been approved for admission to the United States, the International Organization for Migration arranges for medical examinations prior to travel and for the travel itself. If a refugee is found to have a communicable disease, such as tuberculosis, he or she is not allowed to travel to the United States until treatment is given and they have a full recovery.

To learn more about security screening of refugees, prior to their approval for admission to the United States, please visit the Department of Homeland Security’s U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (DHS/USCIS): [Refugee Processing and Security Screening](https://www.uscis.gov/refugeescreening)[[3]](#footnote-3). In addition, the Department of Homeland Security released this video, explaining the security screening process: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/11/24/watch-heres-what-refugee-screening-process-looks>.

Within the private sector, many domestic and international NGO’s, including the nine national refugee resettlement agencies[[4]](#footnote-4), like Episcopal Migration Ministries, work in collaboration with the federal government, organizations, businesses, schools, volunteers, faith communities, and cities to welcome refugees and make sure newcomers are on a pathway to becoming integrated and contributing members of American society.

**Episcopal Migration Ministries**

Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), the refugee resettlement service of The Episcopal Church, is a living example of the Church’s commitment to be a presence of hope, comfort, and welcome to refugees.

Each year, Episcopal Migration Ministries, through a network of 12 local organizations, provides a wide spectrum of services, including resettlement, employment, and intensive medical and mental health services, to more refugees, asylees, and special immigrant visa holders.

These new Americans rely upon this assistance and support as they rebuild their lives in security and peace in communities across the United States. In addition to Episcopal Migration Ministries’ collaboration with local partner organizations, EMM staff members equip, support, and empower dioceses, congregations, and individuals to learn about and find their own place in the welcoming ministry of refugee resettlement.

If you, your congregation, or diocese would like more information about Episcopal Migration Ministries’ work and ways you can be involved, please contact Allison Duvall, manager for church relations and engagement, at aduvall@episcopalchurch.org or (212) 716-6027.

1. 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention.<http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b66c2aa10.pdf>  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The present resettlement countries are Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Uruguay. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.uscis.gov/refugeescreening> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. These nine agencies are: Church World Service (CWS), Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and World Relief Corporation (WR). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)