

General Information about the Refugee Resettlement Program

What is a refugee? A “refugee” is a person who is outside his country and who is unwilling or unable to return because of persecution, or well-founded fear of persecution, on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion (8 U.S.C §1101(a)(42)). After one year of refugee status in the United States, refugees are required to apply to adjust to lawful permanent resident status (8 U.S.C. §1159(a)).

What is the vetting process by the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) prior to an individual entering in the United States as a refugee? Before an individual can be resettled in the United States as a refugee, he must first be vetted through rigorous overseas processing and admissions standards (average length of time from referral to arrival in U.S. is 18-24 months).

1. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees makes referrals to a U.S. Embassy or Non-Governmental Organization.
2. The State Department then collects biographic and other information from eligible applicants to present to DHS for in-person interview and security screening.
3. DHS officers then interview the eligible individuals to determine whether applicants meet the U.S. definition of a refugee.
4. The highest level of security check is conducted on each applicant, including biometric and biographical checks.

All DHS approved refugees then undergo a health screening and receive information on American culture and the importance of self-sufficiency before being flown to the U.S. for resettlement.

What criteria does the State Department and DHS use to define an individual as refugees? In addition to meeting the definition of a refugee, with certain refugee specific exceptions (such as indigence), refugees must be admissible under immigration law. A refugee can be found to be inadmissible for entry into the United States for multiple reasons, including: health related grounds, criminal history, terrorism and national security grounds, willful misrepresentation, and fraudulent documentation.

What is the Refugee Resettlement Program? The Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP), is a federal program authorized by Title IV of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. §§1521 *et seq*). It is designed to “provide permanent and systematic procedures for the admission to this country of refugees of special humanitarian concern to the United States, and to provide comprehensive and uniform provisions for the effective resettlement and absorption of those refugees who are admitted.” The RRP is administered by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (within U.S. HHS) which provides funds, policy, and oversight.

What is the primary purpose of the Refugee Resettlement Program? The purpose of the RRP program is to promote refugee economic self-sufficiency at the earliest possible time. RRP has two concurrent objectives:

1. Provide temporary cash assistance, medical and any other emergency assistance needed by individuals eligible for Refugee Resettlement services in order for them to obtain adequate living conditions.
2. Provide the necessary tools and opportunities for the elimination of obstacles standing in the way of refugees eligible for resettlement services while moving toward economic self-sufficiency and social self-reliance.

Which states currently participate in the Refugee Resettlement Program? Currently, 32 states participate directly in the RRP. However, refugees are resettled in all states except Wyoming and Montana, because no voluntary resettlement organizations are currently operating in either state.

If a state chooses not to participate in the Refugee Resettlement Program, can the federal government locate refugees to that state without notification? Yes, the federal government can locate refugees without notifying the State. The federal government provides refugee notifications to the States that are participating in a RRP through their respective State Refugee Coordinator.

What are the ramifications if a state does not participate in the Refugee Resettlement Program? If a state chooses not to participate in the RRP, it loses oversight of the administration and scope of the program, and the disbursement of federally-funded benefits. Furthermore, Office of Refugee Resettlement is permitted to make grants to, and contracts with, voluntary resettlement organizations to establish or maintain a refugee program regardless of whether a State is participating in, or withdraws from, the program (8 U.S.C. §1522 (e), 45 C.F.R. §400.301).

Are there limitations that a State can place on the number of refugees allowed to resettle in that state? Legally, there are no limitations a state can place on the number of refugees that may come to that state. The federal government works with states and voluntary resettlement organizations to determine how many refugees can realistically be resettled. These voluntary resettlement organizations provide a projected resettlement capacity to the State Department for each fiscal year.

The Refugee Resettlement Program in South Carolina

How long has South Carolina participated in the Refugee Resettlement Program? Since 1975.

To what degree are state funds and resources allocated the Refugee Resettlement Program? No state funds or resources are utilized to administer RRP. The administration of this program is 100% federally funded.

Who funds services associated with the Refugee Resettlement Program in South Carolina? The federal government funds the services associated with the RRP. The RRP, located in the SCDSS Office of Economic Services, performs and coordinates activities to enable refugees and others resettled in South Carolina to reach economic self-sufficiency and social self-reliance, as defined by ORR, as rapidly as possible.

Who administers the selection process for the voluntary resettlement organizations? The US Department of State has authorized nine domestic voluntary resettlement organizations, which total more than 350 affiliated offices across the United States, for placement of refugees in the United States. The following organizations are the only entities authorized to allow refugee resettlement services in the U.S.:

1. Church World Service (CWS)
2. Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC)
3. Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM)
4. Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)
5. International Rescue Committee (IRC)
6. US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
7. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS)
8. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)
9. World Relief Corporation (WR)

What voluntary resettlement organizations participate in the Refugee Resettlement Program in South Carolina?

1. Lutheran Services in Columbia – since 1992.
2. World Relief in Spartanburg – since 2015.

How many refugees have been located in South Carolina through these two voluntary resettlement organizations since October 2010?

Between October 2010 and November 2015, 791 refugees have been resettled in South Carolina.

What refugee nationalities have resettled in South Carolina? Refugee nationalities resettled in South Carolina: Afghani, Berundi, Bhutanese, Burmese, Congolese, Eritrean, Iraqi, Kenya, Somali, Nepali, Rwandan, Ukrainian, Syrian, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Honduran.

As a result of the recent Syrian Crisis, have any Syrian refugees been resettled in South Carolina? Yes. In December 2015, two Syrian refugees were resettled in the Midlands through Lutheran Services Carolinas. Another Syrian family has been approved for resettlement in the state but we do not have an estimated date of arrival or planned location of placement.

Are Guantanamo Bay detainees being relocated to South Carolina through the Refugee Resettlement Program? No.

Where are the Refugee Resettlement Program refugees located in South Carolina? The RRP services are statewide, but the majority of refugee arrivals settle in Richland, Greenville, Lexington, Charleston, Dorchester, and Spartanburg Counties.

What is South Carolina Department of Social Services' (SCDSS) role in the Refugee Resettlement Program? Since 1975, South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS) has been designated by the Governor of South Carolina as the State Agency responsible for the development and administration of the Refugee Resettlement Program for South Carolina. SCDSS remains the designated agency responsible for the administration of the Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP).

As authorized by the Governor of this State, the SCDSS State Director has authority to designate the State Refugee Coordinator. The appointed State Refugee Coordinator (SRC) is Dorothy A. Addison. She has the internal title of State Refugee Resettlement and Non-Emergency Repatriation Services Coordinator at the SCDSS.

The State Refugee Coordinator has been delegated with the lead responsibility to ensure overall coordination and integration of public and private resources for the RRP. The SRC is responsible for monitoring and evaluating all program activities to ensure compliance with policies and instructions that govern the RRP.

What services are offered through the Refugee Resettlement Program in South Carolina?

Federal funding provides the following services through the RRP:

1. Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), which provides cash payment to eligible refugees.
2. The RCA program is modeled after South Carolina's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance program called Family Independence (FI).
3. Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA), which provides medical assistance to eligible refugee populations.
4. Refugee Social Services (RSS), which provides employment assistance, case management, and other services.