

FAQ: REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

Since the 1970s, more than 3 million people seeking freedom from persecution have been invited to start new lives in the United States.

World Relief believes no one is better equipped or more called than the local Church to welcome, serve, and befriend refugees as they try to adjust to living as strangers in a strange place.

former Soviet Union, and Latin America. Over the past decade, the most common national origins were Burma (or Myanmar), Bhutan, and Somalia. In 2016, the largest group of refugees resettled in the US came from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

3. How do refugees end up in the United States?

After fleeing their country and arriving in another, many refugees have no choice but to wait there for years, even decades, for a long-term solution to their predicament. In some cases, the situation in refugees' home country improves, and they are able to safely return. In other cases, the country where they have taken refuge grants them the right to reside there permanently. However, when neither returning nor staying are feasible options, there are rare cases when refugees are offered resettlement in a third country.

The United States is one of several nations that volunteers to accept a limited number of the world's refugees each year. Following the passage of the Refugee Act in 1980, the president annually signs a document determining the number of refugees that will be admitted. In 2016, that number was set at 85,000 - less than 0.4% of the world's refugees.

4. How do we know it's safe to let refugees into our country?

To even be considered for resettlement in a third country like the US, refugees who register with the United Nations must provide substantial evidence to verify that their fear of persecution is reasonable. Each case is thoroughly researched before being referred for resettlement.

Once a case is referred to the US, multiple federal agencies - including the US Department of State, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Defense, the FBI, the National Counterterrorism Center, and US Citizenship and Immigration Services - conduct extensive background checks on each individual. The screening process includes multiple in-person interviews with each family member and

1. What is the definition of a refugee?

Under both US and international law, a refugee is a person with a reasonable fear of persecution for one of five reasons: (1) race, (2) religion, (3) nationality, (4) membership in a particular social group, or (5) political views, and because of this fear, is outside his or her home country and feels it is unsafe to return.

This definition does not include people who flee their countries due to poverty, natural disaster, or even violence - unless that violence is motivated by one of those five reasons.

2. How many people meet that definition?

At the end of 2015, there were more than 65 million people displaced from their homes by persecution, more than at any time in recorded history. While the majority remain displaced within their home countries, 21.3 million have become refugees by fleeing across international borders.

3. Where do most refugees come from?

Undoubtedly, the tangle of conflicts that have engulfed Syria and Iraq over the past several years are the leading cause of forced displacement in the world today. Since war erupted in 2011, more than 4.8 million Syrians have fled their country (through November, 2016). Most have taken refuge in neighboring countries like Turkey (2.8 million), Lebanon (1 million), and Jordan (650,000). Many millions more are displaced within their own countries. So far, only about 16,000 Syrian refugees have been admitted to the US.

However, most refugees have come to the US from a multitude of countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, including the

their acquaintances, the collection of biometric data, and medical screenings to identify potentially infectious diseases. The process generally takes at least 18 months.

Since late 2015, some have voiced concerns that terrorists might try to take advantage of America's hospitality by infiltrating the resettlement program. But compared to the many foreigners who enter the US as tourists, businesspeople, students, or workers, with or without legal status, none are subjected to nearly as much scrutiny as the comparatively small number of refugees. And after having welcomed more than 3 million people since the 1970s - including those fleeing the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War, when screening tools were far less robust than they are today - no one admitted as a refugee has ever committed an act of terrorism on US soil.

5. Do refugees come to the US as legal immigrants?

Yes. Refugees entering the US through the resettlement program are granted a special visa that expires after one year. The visa gives refugees permission to reside and work in the US from the day they arrive. Once this visa expires, refugees must apply to become permanent residents (or "green card" holders). After five years in the US, refugees may apply to become American citizens.

6. What happens when refugees arrive in the US?

After a case has been vetted and approved for resettlement, the US Department of State works in partnership with nine US-based nonprofit agencies - of which World Relief is one - to place refugees in communities and provide them with basic services. These include renting and furnishing an apartment, orientation to their community and American culture, access to medical care, opportunities to learn English, and help finding a job.

Most resettlement agencies encourage community volunteers to serve refugees. World Relief recognizes that adapting to life in a new country takes time, and that no one is better positioned to welcome, serve, and walk alongside refugees during their adjustment than the local Church. World Relief seeks to match every new arrival with a Good Neighbor Team made up of local volunteers. From greeting refugees at the airport to sharing meals, birthdays, and holidays together, the teams can help refugees feel cared for and supported long after the agencies' services end.

7. Are refugees an economic burden on the countries and cities that receive them?

No. Most economists agree that immigration ultimately boosts local and national economies, and that refugees are no exception. While the federal government and most states provide some basic assistance for refugees when they first arrive, almost all refugees are eager to find jobs and become self-sufficient. Not only do refugees work, purchase goods and services, and pay taxes, but a high percentage go on to pursue higher education and start businesses of their own.

8. Why should Christians be concerned with refugees?

God's people have long been taught to welcome strangers and treat them justly. The Hebrew word ger - translated into English variously as foreigner, immigrant, sojourner, or stranger - appears 92 times in the Old Testament, often in the context of God reminding Israel to "love them as yourself, because you were immigrants in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:34; see also Exodus 22:21, 23:9; Leviticus 23:22; Numbers 15:15-16; Deuteronomy 10:18-19, 24:17-22, 27:19; Psalm 94:6-7, 146:9). Whenever Israel mistreated the foreign-born among them, their prophets called special attention to their failure (see Jeremiah 5:5-7, 22:3; Ezekiel 22:6-7, 29; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5).

The Church, too, has long recognized itself as having once been "strangers and aliens, now fellow citizens with God's people" (Ephesians 2:19), welcomed by a God who knew all too well what it was like to be a stranger. Like today's refugees, Jesus' own family once fled into Egypt to escape a violent government (Matthew 2:13-15). So when Jesus teaches his followers that to welcome a stranger is to welcome him, and to refuse a stranger is to refuse him (Matthew 25:34-46), his words express remarkable solidarity with vulnerable outsiders.

Welcoming and serving refugees is a deeply meaningful, practical way to respond to God's call to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). It is also an opportunity to stand with Christians around the world who are persecuted - some of whom come to the US as refugees. And since the majority of refugees come to the US from countries where the Church is persecuted or nonexistent, their arrival is an unprecedented opportunity to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19) without ever leaving one's city.

To learn more about how World Relief is empowering churches in both the United States and the Middle East to serve refugees, visit worldrelief.org.