



REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

SOCIAL SERVICES APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
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ISSUE BRIEF

SUMMARY

A refugee is someone who has been forcibly displaced because of conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations. A refugee is different than an immigrant, an asylum-seeker, or a stateless person. The [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) oversees the 15.0 million refugees worldwide. There are also an additional 28.8 million worldwide who are considered “internally displaced persons” (IDPs) and another 12.0 million worldwide considered “stateless.” The top three 2012 donors to the UNHCR are: 1) the United States (35%), 2) Japan (8%), and the European Union (7%). Countries of first asylum are carrying a large financial burden not reflected in the UNHCR contribution figures. Of the UNHCR stated solutions to deal with refugees, resettlement to a third country involves some 120,000 individuals each year. This is less than one percent of the total refugee population. The U.S. accepted approximately 48% (58,000) of the 120,000 resettlement refugees for 2012. Utah resettled 942 of those. As of 2012, about 50,000 refugees and their children lived in Utah with 99 percent of them in the Salt Lake Valley. Initial services for the first six months are provided by contract from the Department of State to two voluntary organizations in Utah: 1) Catholic Community Services and 2) International Rescue Committee. Major services beyond this period are provided primarily through the Department of Workforce Services (DWS) and include cash assistance, food stamps, medical assistance, child care, employment services, and case management. Office of Refugee Resettlement federal funds are used as a last resort for refugees who do not qualify, as a result of their unique status, for the DWS benefits listed above. Refugees living in Utah come from 29 countries and represent 53 different languages spoken. Currently, the largest number of refugees come from Myanmar (ethnic minorities), Bhutan (ethnic Nepalese), Iraq, and Somalia.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

No Legislative action is required. This brief is for background information only.

REFUGEES

A refugee is someone who has been forcibly displaced because of conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations. International legal protection of refugees centers on a person meeting the criteria for refugee status as laid down in the 1951 Refugee Convention. Under Article 1(A)2, the term “refugee” shall apply to any person 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.

REFUGEES ARE DIFFERENT THAN IMMIGRANTS

Immigrants voluntarily leave their native country seeking a better life. Refugees are *brought* to the U.S. by the U.S. Department of State. Refugees are a special classification of immigrant. All refugees are legal. Refugees may become permanent residents after one year and may apply for citizenship after five years. All refugees can legally work upon arrival in the United States.

REFUGEES ARE DIFFERENT THAN ASYLUM-SEEKERS (ASYLEES)

An asylee is the same as a refugee except that an asylee is adjudicated in the United States while refugees are adjudicated outside of the United States.

REFUGEES ARE DIFFERENT THAN STATELESS PEOPLE

Stateless people are those who are not considered a national by any state. Stateless occurs for a variety of reasons including discrimination against minority groups in nationality legislation, failure to include all residents in the count of citizens when a state becomes independent, and conflicts of laws between nation states.

WORLDWIDE REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

The [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) oversees refugees worldwide. The UNHCR determines who qualifies as a refugee. As of the beginning of 2012 there were some 15.0 million refugees. Of this number, 10.4 million refugees were “of concern” to the UNHCR while another 4.8 million were living in 60 camps in the Middle East served by a different U.N. agency - the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. There are also an additional 28.8 million people worldwide who are considered “internally displaced persons” (IDPs). These are people displaced within their own countries. 10.4 million IDPs live in sub-Saharan Africa while another 5.0 million are in Columbia alone. The top three 2012 donors to the UNHCR are: 1) the United States (35%), 2) Japan (8%), and the European Union (7%). The countries of first asylum are carrying a large financial burden not reflected in the UNHCR contribution figures. In 2012, the United States accepted 58,000 refugees for resettlement in the country. Of the 58,000 refugees accepted for resettlement in the U.S. in 2012, Utah resettled 942 of the 58,000.

Refugees living in Utah come from 29 countries and represent 53 different languages spoken. Currently, the largest number of refugees come from Myanmar (ethnic minorities), Bhutan (ethnic Nepalese), Iraq, and Somalia.

UNHCR SOLUTIONS

On a worldwide basis, the UNHCR sees three basic solutions regarding refugees:

1. ***Voluntary repatriation***: this option represents situations that improve in the native country to the degree that refugees can return to where they came from.
2. ***Local integration***: this option involves resettlement in nearby host countries. The ideal solution for this option would allow for a pathway to citizenship with the refugee being able to work legally in the host country.
3. ***Resettlement in a 3rd country***: this option typically provides a solution to approximately 120,000 people each year. This number represents approximately 0.8 percent of the total worldwide refugee population. This option does provide a solution for some of the most desperate refugees where there are no other practical resolutions. It also helps take the pressure off of neighboring countries.

Of the 10.4 million refugees of concern to the UNHCR, half live in Asia and another 28 percent live in Africa. These refugees exist in widely varying conditions, from well-established camps to makeshift shelters to living out in the open. The UNHCR works with the United States, along with other participating countries, to provide for solution #3 above. The U.S. accepted approximately 48% of the 120,000 resettlement refugees for 2012 in option #3.

U.S. REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

U.S. policy allows refugees of special humanitarian concern entrance into the country. Each September the White House submits a memorandum to the Secretary of State providing for a determination and authorization for the admission of up to a specified number of refugees to the United States during a given fiscal year. Three federal agencies play a key role in the refugee process:

1. ***Department of State***: is responsible for the overseas operations for U.S. bound refugees. The Department of State is also responsible for initial resettlement services through a cooperative agreement with 13 national voluntary agencies with affiliate offices located throughout the U.S. Initial resettlement services last no longer than six months. The Department of State provides a one-time grant of approximately, \$1,800 per refugee.
2. ***Department of Homeland Security (Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services)***: is responsible to coordinate security background checks.
3. ***Department of Health and Human Services (Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR))***: is responsible for services after refugees arrive in the U.S. and after the initial resettlement services provided by the Department of State. ORR also coordinates all resettlement activities with the various states.

In 2012, the United States accepted 58,000 refugees for resettlement in the country.

UTAH REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

Of the 58,000 refugees accepted for resettlement in the U.S. in 2012, Utah resettled 942, or 1.6 percent. Although Utah ranks as the 34th largest state in total population, Utah is 23rd in accepting refugees for resettlement. As of 2012, about 50,000 refugees and their children live in Utah with 99 percent of them living in the Salt Lake Valley.

Voluntary Agencies in Utah Assisting with Refugee Resettlement:

In the U.S. there are 13 national voluntary agencies with affiliate offices located throughout the country. Two of these agencies have offices in Utah. The Department of State contracts directly with these two agencies to provide initial resettlement services. The two agencies are:

1. Catholic Community Services
2. International Rescue Committee

Resettlement Core Services funded by the Department of State include:

- Reception and placement (airport pickup, housing, food) - \$900 per individual to cover apartment deposit, rent, household items, and other necessities.
- Case management, orientations, job placement, health screenings, and school enrollment
- Assistance with DWS applications for services

Benefits Provided to Refugees through the Department of Workforce Services:

The Department of Workforce Services provides the following benefits to refugees:

- Cash assistance through the Family Employment Program (FEP)
- Food Stamps
- Medical assistance through Medicaid
- Child care assistance
- Employment services
- TANF case management for 2 years

Because of their unique status, refugees qualify for the programs listed above. In addition to the services above, the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement provides additional funding to states to assist with services for refugees. The funding shown in Table 1 pays for expenses outside of the programs listed above. For example, ORR funding pays for refugee cash and medical assistance if the refugee is not eligible for Medicaid or TANF. ORR funding only covers the first 8 months in the U.S.

**FY 2013 Department of Workforce Services (DWS) Refugee Program
Expenses with State and Federal Funding**

Refugee Program	Expenses	%	Federal	State
Health Screening	2,609,600	29.3%	2,609,600	-
Unaccompanied Minors	2,019,300	22.6%	2,019,300	-
Social Services	970,700	10.9%	970,700	-
Medical Assistance	908,800	10.2%	908,800	-
Administration	760,700	8.5%	760,700	-
Targeted (Employment) Assistance Grant	617,000	6.9%	617,000	-
Cash Assistance	394,000	4.4%	394,000	-
School Impact Award	265,000	3.0%	265,000	-
Capacity Building	195,200	2.2%	-	195,200
Targeted Grant Pre-Literacy Training	111,300	1.2%	111,300	-
Services to Older Refugees	24,300	0.3%	24,300	-
VISTA Grant	15,500	0.2%	15,500	-
Work Refugee Day	10,500	0.1%	10,500	-
World Refugee Day	8,000	0.1%	8,000	-
Refugee Services Fund	4,300	0.0%	4,300	-
Refugee Symposium	3,200	0.0%	3,200	-
EREP Operational Refugee Program Costs	1,600	0.0%	1,600	-
Refugee Symposium	200	0.0%	200	-
Totals	8,919,200	100%	8,724,000	195,200

Note: The above amounts do not include other program funds provided to refugees by DWS such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or Food Stamps), Medicaid, child care assistance,

Table 1

The Utah State Refugee Services Office, located within the Department of Workforce Services, was created in 2008. This office coordinates services, policy review, advocacy, resource development, and management for all essential refugee services in Utah.

Other Non-DWS Benefits Provided to Refugees:

In addition to DWS and the two voluntary agencies, there are multiple refugee service providers who operate using private contributions, grants, and contracts. There are also multiple refugee community organizations funded with private funds who offer assistance to refugees.

INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES INTO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Many refugees, as part of the very reason they are refugees, have experience war, genocide, and other highly traumatic events. Successful integration would typically involve communities welcoming refugees as equals and appreciating the diversity associated with refugees and refugees ultimately becoming self-sufficient.

WHERE REFUGEES COME FROM

Refugees living in Utah come from 29 countries and represent 53 different languages spoken. Currently, the largest number of refugees come from Myanmar (ethnic minorities), Bhutan (ethnic Nepalese), Iraq, and Somalia. Refugee resettlement follows various conflicts and political upheavals throughout the world.

- Since 1975 approximately 1,400,000 refugees have come to the U.S. from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.
- In the 1990s the U.S. resettled over 150,000 refugees from the former Soviet Union, Armenia, and the Ukraine.
- From the 1990s through up through today, the U.S. has resettled 140,000 refugees from the Balkan region with most being from Bosnia but also some from Serbia, Croatia, and Kosovo.
- Beginning in the 1990s refugees began being resettled from Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan.
- There are also many refugees from Africa including Sudan, Somalia, Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda.

OBSTACLES TO SUCCESSFUL REFUGEE INTEGRATION

Integrating into a new community is not an easy thing. Following are some of the major obstacles to successful integration as determined by the International Rescue Committee:

- ***Lack of adequate employment services***
- ***Lack of sustainable housing***
- ***Lack of adequate transportation***
- ***Lack of adequate and linguistically appropriate health care***
- ***Individual and community isolation***
- ***Lack of adequate education***
- ***Disaffected refugee youth***
- ***Lack of refugee community capacity***