

# REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

SOCIAL SERVICES APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE  
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## ISSUE BRIEF

### **SUMMARY**

A refugee is someone who has been forcibly displaced because of persecution due to race, religion, political opinion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group. Refugees constitute a special class of immigrant brought to the United States by our government because they have been forced to flee their home country. The [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) determines who is a refugee and oversees the 20 million refugees worldwide. There are an additional 38 million worldwide who are considered “internally displaced persons” (IDPs) and another 10 million worldwide considered “stateless.” The top three budget year 2015 donors as of September 18, 2015 to the UNHCR are: 1) the United States (46%), 2) United Kingdom (7%), and the Japan (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, the UNHCR submitted 103,900 refugees for resettlement to a third country in 2014. In federal fiscal year 2014, the U.S. resettled 69,987 refugees, of which Utah received 1,085. As of 2015, about 60,000 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), Iraq, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

### **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 A SPECIAL CATEGORY OF 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 AND STATELESS PEOPLE

Stateless people are those who are not considered a national by any state. Some refugees are stateless but not all stateless people are refugees. Statelessness 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. At the end of 2015 there were some 20 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 38 million people worldwide who are considered “internally displaced persons” (IDPs). These are people displaced within their own countries. In 2015, Columbia had 6,000,000; the Democratic Republic of Congo, 2,800,000; Iraq, 4,000,000; and Syria, 7,600,000. The top three 2015 donors to the UNHCR are: 1) the United States (46%), 2) United Kingdom (7%), and the Japan (7%). The countries of first asylum are carrying a large financial burden not reflected in the UNHCR contribution figures. In federal fiscal year 2014, the U.S. resettled 69,987 refugees, of which Utah received 1085.

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### 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 3<sup>rd</sup> country:** In 2014 The UNHCR submitted 103,900 refugees for resettlement. 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 countries providing asylum temporarily, pending eventual repatriation or resettlement.

Syria is the world's biggest producer of both internally displaced people (7.6 million) and refugees (3.88 million at the end of 2014). Afghanistan (2.59 million) and Somalia (1.1 million) are the next biggest refugee source countries. 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. In federal fiscal year 2014, the U.S. resettled 69,987 refugees, of which Utah received 1,085.

### 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 9 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.

### **UTAH REFUGEE ASSISTANCE**

In federal fiscal year 2014, the U.S. resettled 69,986 refugees, of which Utah received 1,085. Although Utah ranks as the 33<sup>rd</sup> largest state in total population, Utah is 23<sup>rd</sup> in accepting refugees for resettlement. As of 2015, about 60,000 refugees and their children live in Utah with 99 percent of them living in the Salt Lake Valley.

To help manage the refugee resettlement resources, The Governor's Refugee Advisory Board helps set priorities for refugee services and assists in addressing resettlement challenges.

#### ***Voluntary Agencies in Utah Assisting with Refugee Resettlement:***

In the U.S. there are 9 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) - \$1,100 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
- Case management for all newly arrived refugees for 2 years
- Capacity-building assistance for refugee community organizations

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 cash and medical assistance during the first 8 months in the U.S. Table 2 shows refugee expenditures paid through other benefit programs.

In addition, the new Refugee Education and Training Center is a partnership with Salt Lake Community College, Utah State University, the Department of Workforce Services and other community stakeholders to help refugees acquire the skills necessary to move from entry level to higher skilled jobs with salaries that will allow refugee families to be truly self-sufficient.

**FY 2015 Department of Workforce Services (DWS) Refugee Program  
Expenses with State, Dedicated Credits, and Federal Funding**

<b>Refugee Program</b>	<b>Expenses</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Dedicated Credits</b>
Health Screening	1,634,210	18.6%	1,634,210		
Unaccompanied Minors	2,401,858	27.4%	2,401,858		
Social Services	1,114,046	12.7%	1,114,046		
Medical Assistance	1,113,642	12.7%	1,113,642		
Administration	968,687	11.0%	968,687		
Targeted (Employment) Assistance Grant	472,223	5.4%	472,223		
Cash Assistance	428,303	4.9%	428,303		
School Impact Award	256,278	2.9%	256,278		
Capacity Building	203,704	2.3%		203,704	
Targeted Grant Pre-Literacy Training	139,169	1.6%	139,169		
World Refugee Day	19,752	0.2%	19,752		
Refugee Services Fund (Fund 2065)	13,353	0.2%			13,353
eREP Operational Refugee Program Costs	12,021	0.1%	12,021		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>8,777,247</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>8,560,190</b>	<b>203,704</b>	<b>13,353</b>

**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, and case management.

Table 1

## Refugee Expenditures in Other Programs

PROGRAM	REFUGEE COUNTS	BENEFIT AMOUNTS	General Fund	Federal Funds	Restricted Funds
CHILD CARE	365	\$3,247,911	\$246,507	\$3,001,404	
TANF	811	\$1,820,180		\$1,820,180	
FOOD STAMPS	3,678	\$24,895,101		\$24,895,101	
GENERAL ASSISTANCE	71	\$46,103	\$46,103		
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE	270	\$819,892			\$819,892
REFUGEE CASH ASSISTANCE	379	\$428,303		\$428,303	
REFUGEE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE	242	\$1,113,642		\$1,113,642	
OTHER MEDICAL ASSISTANCE	2,871	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable
<b>TOTAL BENEFITS</b>		<b>\$32,371,132</b>	<b>\$292,610</b>	<b>\$31,258,630</b>	<b>\$819,892</b>

**Note 1:** For Medicaid and CHIP, Workforce Services does not have this expense information.

**Note 2:** Counts and benefit amounts were queried from the following "Alien Types" and/or "Alien Groups" found in the eREP Households table for the date range July 2014 to June 2015. Query date - November 30, 2015.

**Note 3:** "Refugee Counts" are program specific and cannot be added up because a refugee may be enrolled in one or more programs at a time.

Table 2 – Source, Utah Department of Workforce Services

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 that operate using private contributions, grants, and contracts. There are also multiple refugee community organizations funded with state and private funds that offer assistance to refugees.

### **INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES INTO LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

Many refugees, as part of the very reason they are refugees, have experienced 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), Iraq, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. 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.
- Nearly 506,858 refugees from the former Soviet Union arrived in the U.S. between 1983 and 2005.
- 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 Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of 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
- Lack of English language instruction