

## A Refugee's Journey Through the Vetting Process

A **REFUGEE** is defined by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) *as a person forced to flee their home country to escape persecution, war, or violence.* The UNHCR decides if a person fits the definition of refugee.

**RESETTLEMENT** is *the careful selection by governments such as the US – for purposes of lawful admission – of vulnerable refugees who can neither return to their home country nor live in safety in neighboring countries.*

- During registration interviews, the UNHCR chooses those refugees it deems eligible for resettlement based on vulnerability categories. These categories include:
  - \*Women and girls at risk
  - \*Medical Needs
  - \*Survivors of violence and/or torture
  - \*Children at risk
  - \*Family reunification
- Only those refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health, or other fundamental rights are at risk are considered for resettlement in another country.
- Refugees do not get to choose the country where they will be resettled. The UNHCR makes that determination.
- Those who may pose a threat to others or who are found to have committed serious crimes during the screening process would not be referred for resettlement by the UNHCR.

**\*\*\*\*\*LESS THAN 1% OF THE WORLD'S REFUGEES ARE EVER RESETTLED\*\*\*\*\***

There is currently a 20 - step vetting process\* that refugees must go through before they are allowed entry into the United States. This process can take up to 2 years, sometimes longer. It is conducted entirely in locations outside of the United States. A refugee must follow these steps:

1. Registration with the UN.
2. Initial Interview with the UN.
3. Granting of refugee status by the UN.
4. Referral for resettlement in the United States.
5. Interview with State Department contractors.
6. 1st background check.
7. Higher-level background check for some refugees.
8. Another background check.
9. 1st fingerprint screening; photo taken.
10. 2nd fingerprint screening.
11. 3rd fingerprint screening.
12. Case reviewed at United States Immigration headquarters.
13. Some cases referred for additional review. (Syrian applicants must undergo these 2 additional steps.)
14. Extensive, in-person interview with Homeland Security personnel.
15. Homeland Security approval is required to move forward.
16. Medical screening for contagious diseases.
17. Cultural orientation class.
18. Matched with an American resettlement agency. There are currently 9 non-governmental agencies that assist refugees with resettlement.
19. Additional multi-agency security check before leaving for the United States.
20. Final security check at an American airport.

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According to the UNHCR, the vetting process includes:

- 8 US Federal Government Agencies
- 6 Different Security Databases
- 5 Separate Background Checks
- 4 Biometric Security Checks
- 3 Separate In-Person Interviews
- 2 Inter-Agency Security Checks

**The United States government decides whether or not to accept a refugee for resettlement based on the findings from this extensive, in-depth and lengthy vetting process.**

Sources: UNHCR Refugee Resettlement Facts; <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/588a14fc4>

\*Park, H. and Buchanan, L. (2017, Jan. 29) *Refugees Entering the U.S. Already Face a Rigorous Vetting Process.* Retrieved from [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/29/us/refugee-vetting-process.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/29/us/refugee-vetting-process.html?_r=0)

## Refugees and Immigration - Frequently Asked Questions

### What organization receives refugees in South Dakota?

- The US government determines how many refugees will enter the US each year. Lutheran Social Services (LSS) works with local partners to determine how many of those refugees will arrive in Sioux Falls, which is the only resettlement site in South Dakota.
- Refugees are free to move after initial processing in the primary resettlement community. Refugees in Aberdeen are 'secondary migrants'.
- More information about the role LSS plays in resettlement can be found at <http://www.lsssd.org/what-we-do/family-services/center-for-new-americans/>

### Is LSS paid?

- LSS receives grants from the federal government to cover the initial costs for welcoming and processing refugees.

### Are refugees given money?

- Refugees are eligible for cash assistance for up to 8 months from date of arrival. One refugee could receive \$449 per month. A family of 5 would receive \$749 per month. This small stipend covers basic necessities until they become self-sufficient. To receive this money, refugees must attend at least 6 hours per week of ESL training, attend 36 hours of community orientation, and work cooperatively with an employment program and case management through LSS.
- All refugees are legally qualified for employment upon arrival to the US. Case management and employment services are available to them for up to 5 years.

### What is the difference between a refugee and an immigrant?

- Refugees *are forced* to flee their home country because they are afraid for their personal safety, and are unable to return home due to dangers of persecution and violence.
- Immigrants *choose* to leave their homes, and come to the US for a variety of reasons, including education, employment, and to join family members.

### What is a Green Card?

- Green Card status is proof that someone has been granted authorization to live and work in the US as a permanent resident. Refugees are required to apply for permanent residence (a Green Card) one year after being admitted to the US. (<https://www.uscis.gov/green-card/green-card-through-refugee-or-asylee-status>)

### How many immigrants/refugees are in Aberdeen?

- A rough estimate from November 2016 was between 1100 and 1300. This number was based on employment figures and the number of school-age children. The total numbers are in constant flux.

### Are the immigrants in Aberdeen Muslim?

- Immigrants are Christian, Muslim, and other religions.
- 1% of the US population is Muslim (Christian Century 3-15-17 p. 14)

### Where do they work and live?

- Some places of employment include Molded Fiber Glass, Demkota Ranch Beef, Twin City Fan, Banner Engineering, 3M, Midstates Printing, and Walmart.
- Most live in one of the 3000 rental units in Aberdeen, or in their own homes. Some drive from other cities to work in Aberdeen.

### Are refugees educated people?

- 28% of refugees over the age of 25 who settle in the United States have at least a 4 year degree. (Wall Street Journal 2-22-17)
- 19.4 % of Aberdeen's population over the age of 25 has at least a 4 year degree. (<http://aberdeensd.com/105/Education-Levels>)

### Are immigrants and refugees learning to speak English?

- School aged immigrant children receive instruction in English through the Aberdeen School District
- Adult ESL free classes are held at Cornerstones Career Learning Center (<https://www.CornerstonesCareer.com>) and through NSU's AEP/ESL programs ([Tara.Arntsen@northern.edu](mailto:Tara.Arntsen@northern.edu)). Molded Fiber Glass provides ESL instruction for its employees.

### Do immigrants/refugees in South Dakota pay taxes?

- In 2014, \$32.6 million went to state and local taxes, \$58 million went to federal taxes. In 2014, immigrants also contributed \$11.3 million to Medicare and \$48.2 million to Social Security. (New American Economy, August 2016)

### Are immigrants/refugees on 'welfare'?

- Most documented individuals are not eligible to receive benefits from Medicaid, TANF, SNAP, or SSI during at least their first 5 years in the US, regardless of how much they have worked or paid in taxes. (<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/addressing-common-questions-immigration>)

### What effect does the influx of immigrants have on crime?

- In 200 metropolitan areas from 1970-2010, murder, robbery, burglary and larceny rates decreased as immigrants increased. A recent meta-analysis of 50 studies published between 1994 and 2014 conclude that cities with larger immigrant populations have lower crime rates. (Wall Street Journal 3/13/17)

### Are there undocumented immigrants in South Dakota?

- Undocumented immigrants comprise 0.6% of the state's population. (Pew Research Center [Hispanic Trends Project 2014, Hispanic Population by State](#)).
- In 2014, unauthorized immigrants paid \$4.2 million in state and local taxes, including \$3.3 million in sales tax and \$833,000 in property tax. (Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy).
- The Social Security Administration estimates that, in the past decade, undocumented workers have contributed \$100 BILLION to Social Security, but it is unlikely they will ever benefit from their contributions.