

Background

The Minnesota Department of Human Services' (DHS) Resettlement Programs Office supports the statewide resettlement of refugees and their effective integration into Minnesota communities. The office's activities are 100% federally funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Unlike some states, Minnesota does not currently spend state dollars on refugee resettlement.

Each year, DHS's Resettlement Programs Office receives approximately five million dollars in federal funding. It also supports the work of nine DHS employees and five Minnesota Department of Health employees.

Executive order on refugee resettlement

On September 26, 2019, President Trump issued an executive order requiring state and local governments to provide written consent to the federal government before refugees can be resettled in their jurisdictions. DHS currently provides input to the federal government about the proposed number of individuals each local agency will resettle. That being said, the authority to place refugees in specific states and localities lies solely with the U.S. Department of State.

On November 6, 2019, the U.S. Department of State and HHS issued guidance requiring local resettlement affiliates to submit written consent from governors and the "chief executive officer of the local government (county or equivalent)" with their application to resettle refugees. Letters submitted will be posted on a federal website. The order will generally apply to all arriving refugees including those seeking to reunite with family members already living in Minnesota.

Who are refugees?

Refugees are people who have been forced to flee their home countries due to violence or persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. They are unable to return because their home governments are unable or unwilling to protect them. According to the UN High Commission for Refugees, there were more than 25 million refugees living outside of their home country in 2019. Resettlement in other countries (such as the United States) is generally seen as a last resort which is only offered after all alternatives have been exhausted.

The U.S. Department of State administers the Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), which is a humanitarian protection program designed to resettle refugees of "special humanitarian concern" in the United States. More than 70% of these refugees are women and children. The federal government annually determines how many refugees will be admitted and identifies priority populations. People selected to resettle through USRAP have legal, permanent status in the United States, authorization to work immediately upon arrival, and a pathway to citizenship after five years.

Refugee resettlement is part of Minnesota's history:

Minnesota has a long history of supporting refugees and values their contributions to the state's history, culture, and economy. Since 1980, more than 100,000 individuals (from more than 100 countries) have made Minnesota home through USRAP. The vast majority of refugees who come to Minnesota are joining family members who already live here.

In recent years, Minnesota has seen a steep decline in refugee admissions due to the Trump administration's annual lowering of the national admissions cap. The current FY2020 admissions cap was recently set at 18,000, which is the lowest in U.S. history.

Refugees resettled in Minnesota in the last five years:

- FY2019: 848
- FY2018: 663
- FY2017: 1,003
- FY2016: 3,059
- FY2015: 2,166

Refugee resettlement is a secure process

Minnesota's history of receiving refugees does not come at the expense of public health or national security. Before resettling, refugees undergo the most extensive screening/vetting process of any classification of entrant to the US.

Eight federal agencies are involved in the vetting process:

- Department of Homeland Security
- Department of State
- Department of Justice
- Department of Defense
- National Counterterrorism Center
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Federal Bureau of Investigations
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Approximately 20 different assessments are conducted prior to a refugee's arrival:

- Six global security database searches
- Five background checks
- Four biometric security checks
- Three in-person interviews (with specially trained Homeland Security officers)
- Two interagency security reviews

Refugees benefit Minnesota's society and economy

Refugee resettlement yields long-term social and economic benefits. Refugees annually pay more than \$227 million in state and local taxes and contribute to Social Security. Once resettled, they fill needed jobs throughout the state, often open their own businesses, and foster intercultural connections in their communities. Refugees have a combined spending power of \$1.8 billion in Minnesota alone and accounted for 7.5% of Minnesota's Gross Domestic Product in 2012.

Refugee resettlement programs matter:

After experiencing extreme hardships such as displacement, war, genocide, severe poverty, or loss of family members, Minnesota's refugees rebuild their lives from the ground up. DHS's Resettlement Programs Office works with resettlement agencies, counties, schools, and community-based organizations to help them establish a strong foundation to reach their full potential. For up to five years after a refugee's arrival, the Office provides federally-funded services designed to:

- **Help adults secure jobs and advance in employment**
 - The Resettlement Programs Office committed \$1,755,000 for these services in FY2019.
- **Support academic success among students**
 - Examples include after-school tutoring, in-school supports, and academic interventions.
 - These services are often focused on students whose first-generation parents are new to Minnesota's school system.
 - The Resettlement Programs Office committed \$335,000 for these services in FY2019.
- **Provide health screening and medical assistance**
 - The Resettlement Programs Office works with local public health offices to ensure that refugees receive a health screening within 90 days of their arrival and are connected to primary health care services.
 - The Resettlement Programs Office committed \$496,410 for these services in FY2019.
- **Provide community orientation to help people learn about local systems and culture**
 - The Resettlement Programs Office also helps educate a refugee's new community.
- **Help refugees connect to community resources**
 - Examples include stable, affordable housing and transportation (including understanding public transportation systems, obtaining a driver's license, etc.).
- **Assist refugees who apply to become U.S. citizens**
- The Resettlement Programs Office committed a combined total of \$1,068,700 for community orientation, community resource connection, and citizenship assistance in FY2019.

Additional information:

- [Executive Order on Enhancing State and Local Involvement in Refugee Resettlement](#) - White House, September 2019
- [Executive Order Implementation Guidance](#) (Pages 3, 11, 12) - U.S. Department of State
- [Resettlement Programs Office Fact Sheet](#) - Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2019
- [Refugee Security Vetting Flow Chart](#) - United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2018
- [Economic Impact of Immigrants in Minnesota](#) - American Immigration Council, 2018
- [Immigrants and Minnesota's Workforce](#) - University of Minnesota, 2017
- [MN Economic Statistics for Immigrant / Refugee populations](#) - New American Economy, 2019
- [The Economic Impact of Refugees in America](#) (uses MN as a case study) - New American Economy, 2017