



Questions and Answers: Refugees

 **Alert:** If you are an Afghan seeking refugee resettlement, in general, you must be given access to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

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Who is a Refugee?

A refugee is a person who has fled their country of origin because of past persecution or a fear of future persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. If the person is not in the United States, they may seek access to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). If the person is already in the United States, they may apply for [asylum](#).

A refugee does not include a person who has left their home only to seek a more prosperous life, also known as an economic alien. People fleeing civil wars and natural disasters may not be eligible for resettlement under U.S. law. However, they may fall within the protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). For more information about UNHCR, see the [UNHCR](#) website.

Which Refugees are Eligible for Resettlement in the United States?

Each year, the United States resettles a limited number of refugees. Refugees may be eligible for a USCIS interview for resettlement in the United States if:

- UNHCR, the U.S. embassy, or a non-governmental organization refers them to the United States for resettlement;
- They are members of specified groups with special characteristics in certain countries determined by the United States; or
- They are the qualifying relative of an individual in the United States who is a refugee or asylee.

Generally, refugees must be outside their country of citizenship to be eligible for the USRAP. However, the USRAP processes refugees in their home countries in certain locations.

Refugees must be admissible to the United States. An applicant can be found “inadmissible” to the United States for a variety of reasons, including criminal, health, or security-related grounds. The applicant also cannot be firmly resettled in another country or have persecuted others.

Ineligibility for resettlement under the U.S. refugee program does not necessarily prevent eligibility for UNHCR protection or resettlement in other countries.

Are Refugees in Urgent Situations Eligible for Expedited Processing?

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is committed to processing refugee applications as quickly as possible. However, there may be instances when an applicant is facing a particularly urgent situation, such as an acute medical or protection concern that would warrant expedited processing of the case. Applicants who believe they meet these criteria may contact the local Resettlement Support Center handling their case.

How Can I Find Out If I Am Eligible For Resettlement in the United States?

USRAP processing priorities are established annually.

For the current priorities and the refugee admissions ceiling for the year, see the [Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2025 \(PDF\)](#). If you believe that you might be eligible for resettlement in the United States, you may make your interest known to the [nearest UNHCR office](#). [Certain refugee applicants can start the application process with the Resettlement Support Center \(RSC\) without a referral.](#) If you have relatives in the United States who are refugees or asylees, they should contact the nearest [Resettlement Agency](#) for advice on eligibility to refer qualifying family members for access to the USRAP and help preparing the necessary forms to support your application.

What Kind Of Processing Can I Expect Under The United States Refugee Program?

USRAP partners endeavor to process cases as efficiently as possible. Cases are adjudicated on an individual basis and processing times will vary.

U.S. Department of State RSCs carry out most of the casework preparation for refugee eligibility interviews. The RSCs pre-screen applicants, help prepare the applications for USCIS, initiate background security checks, and arrange medical examinations for refugees approved by USCIS.

Following USCIS approval, the RSC also asks for the names and addresses of any relatives in the United States, for details on the person's work history and job skills, and for any special educational or medical needs of the refugee and accompanying family members, in order to determine the best resettlement arrangements for the refugee.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) generally arranges and provides a loan for transportation to the United States. Refugees are expected to repay the cost of their transportation once they are established in the United States. Individual refugees or their relatives may pay for transportation costs in advance.

What Family Members May Accompany Me To The United States If I Am Approved?

Generally, family members that may accompany you to the United States include your spouse and unmarried children under the age of 21 who were with you at the refugee interview.

If your spouse or unmarried children under the age of 21 were not with you at the time of your interview, they will generally be able to follow you to the United States, but you will have to file a [Form I-730, Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition](#), for each of them within 2 years of your arrival.

In either case, your dependent relative must also be admissible to the United States and must not have engaged in persecution of others. Other relatives may qualify for resettlement in the United States if they have access to the USRAP and have their own refugee claims.

Your case may include your spouse, child (unmarried and under 21 years of age), and in some limited circumstances, other family members. You may include a same-sex spouse in your application if you and your spouse are legally married. As a general matter, USCIS looks to the law of the place where the marriage took place when determining whether it is valid for immigration law purposes. Same-sex partners who are not married but who are qualified to access the USRAP under one of the three designated worldwide processing priorities may have their cases cross-referenced so that they can be interviewed at the same time and, if approved by USCIS, resettled in the same geographic area in the United States.

How Can I Report My New Address?

If you are outside of the United States and have a pending refugee case with the USRAP, contact the RSC with jurisdiction over your case to update your address.

Once in the United States, you are required to notify USCIS within 10 days of changing your address. You may file [Form AR-11, Change of Address](#), or change your address online. See the [How to Change Your Address](#) page for additional information.

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