

## Minnesota Refugee Programs Office Overview

The Refugee Resettlement Programs Office is a federally funded office within the Minnesota Department of Human Services that supports the effective resettlement of refugees in Minnesota, and ensures their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity and achieve their highest potential. This office ensures accessibility to mainstream programs for people with refugee status, distributes federal dollars to local agencies for supplemental services, and provides education and information about refugees in Minnesota.

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### Refugees are part of Minnesota's immigrant history

The term "refugee" describes an experience of loss and persecution but also perseverance and hope. "Refugee" is a legal immigration status. Most refugees become citizens and make Minnesota their permanent home. People who come to Minnesota with refugee status are our neighbors. They have jobs. They start businesses. They pay taxes. They attend universities. They join the multitude of other [immigrants](#) who have made Minnesota their home since the 1800s.

### Minnesota is home to refugees who have fled persecution to find safety in the United States

[Immigrants come to Minnesota](#) for many reasons. Refugees are a specific category of immigrants with legal permanent status based on a [legal definition](#) that includes the experience or well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or social group.

### The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is a humanitarian protection program

Established by the Refugee Act of 1980, it is a federally administered program. [Communities](#) welcome refugees through [resettlement agencies](#) with thousands of volunteers who help new arrivals. There are currently [21.3 million](#) people in the world who have fled their countries for fear of persecution, over half of whom are children. Less than 1 percent of these people are given the opportunity of permanent resettlement to a country such as the United States.

### The president determines the maximum number of refugee arrivals annually

The refugee admissions report includes detailed justification for the number and nationalities of refugees the U.S. will accept and is submitted to Congress annually and signed by the president. For 2016-17 a maximum of 110,000 refugee arrivals was set. An Executive Order in January 2017 reduced that number to 50,000, the lowest number recorded for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. In 2016, the United States accepted [84,994](#) refugees. The number of [arrivals](#) and their countries of origin reflect global events and the United States humanitarian commitment to providing safe haven for those fleeing genocide, war and persecution.

### Refugees are the most vetted group of any travelers that enter the United States

Refugees are subject to the highest level of [security](#) checks facing a minimum 18- to 24-month [processing period](#). The [vetting procedure](#) involves the Department of Homeland Security, Department of State, Department of Justice, Department of Defense, National Counterterrorism Center and the FBI. It includes six

different security databases, five separate background checks, four biometric security checks, three separate in-person interviews and two interagency security reviews. The Department of Homeland Security screens fingerprints against FBI and Department of Defense biometric databases and “watch list” information in the United States and overseas. The Department of Homeland Security reviews results, and individuals must pass time-sensitive security checks before being approved for refugee status. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Transportation Security Administration screen refugees prior to entry into the country.

### **Minnesota refugee resettlement reunites families**

In 2016, more than 95 percent of refugees coming to Minnesota joined family members already living here. Minnesota has six [local agencies](#) that provide initial reception services for arrivals. After one year, refugees are eligible to apply for a green card. After five years, they can apply to become [U.S. citizens](#) if they meet all eligibility criteria, including a criminal background check.

### **Minnesota’s refugee population is from all over the world**

In 2016, Minnesota received more than [3,000](#) refugee arrivals from 28 different countries and an additional 2,000 refugees who moved here from other states. Minnesota’s largest arrival populations currently are from Somalia, Ethiopia and ethnic minorities from Burma. Minnesota has welcomed more than [100,000](#) refugees from 99 different countries since 1979.

### **Refugees come with little material support and rebuild new lives in Minnesota**

Refugees are eligible for the same supports and services as other Minnesotans. Local refugee resettlement agencies receive a one-time federal payment of \$1,125 per person to assist refugees with initial expenses of resettling and help with basic needs during their first three months. This includes rent, household supplies and winter clothing. Refugees pay back the cost of their travel to the United States starting two months after their arrival. There is no special access to supports so refugees rely on existing systems to find affordable housing, get a job and provide for their families.

### **Refugees and immigrants contribute to a competitive Minnesota economy**

Refugees and immigrants offer skills to a needed workforce, provide entrepreneurial innovation and expand worldwide networks. The focus of resettlement is self-sufficiency through employment. Nationally refugees are employed at [higher rates](#) than their United States born peers. Immigrants, including refugees, make up 7 percent of the state’s population but 9 percent of the [workforce](#). They are 6 percent of the state’s business owners and accounted for 7.5 percent, or \$22.4 billion, of Minnesota’s [Gross Domestic Product](#) in 2012. In the Twin Cities metropolitan area, immigrants and refugees own 11 percent of all businesses.

### **Refugees contribute to Minnesota’s continued growth**

The Minnesota State Demographic Center predicts that “[more than 63,000 additional net migrants](#)” will be needed by 2020 to offset reductions in the state’s labor force due to retiring baby boomers. In [2013](#), immigrants in Minnesota contributed more than \$1.5 billion to Social Security and Medicare. In 2010, immigrant-owned businesses generated more than [\\$771 million](#) in annual income for the state.