

Refugees in Utah

Who is considered a refugee? A refugee is someone who, “owing to a 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 or her nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (8 U.S. Code § 1101).

Refugees often flee their home countries because of conflict, ethnic cleansing, regime change, forced displacement, threats to themselves and their families, and other persecution. When they cross the border into a second country, they may integrate into an urban area, or live in camps—sometimes for years, even decades, before a durable solution is found for them. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights refers qualified refugee applicants to the United States.

Refugees in the United States: Every year, Congress determines the number of refugees able to resettle in the United States. The U.S. has welcomed nearly 70,000 refugees per year since 2009, and almost 85,000 in 2016, adding to the 1.8 million that have arrived since 1980; 35-40 percent of refugees resettled in the U.S. are children.

Vetting and Arrival Process: The US has a vetting and arrival process to help refugees relocate. This process involves multiple agencies including the Department of Homeland Security, State Department, and Department of Health and Human Services. There is a security process that involves a clearance screening, a placement process, and a transition process.

SECURITY

- Pre-screening by Resettlement Support Center staff
- On-site interview by CIS Refugee Corps
- Security clearance and fingerprinting
- Health screening

PLACEMENT

- Placement allocations through 9 national Voluntary Agencies
- Cultural orientation & departure processing
- Initial reception and placement takes 30-90 days

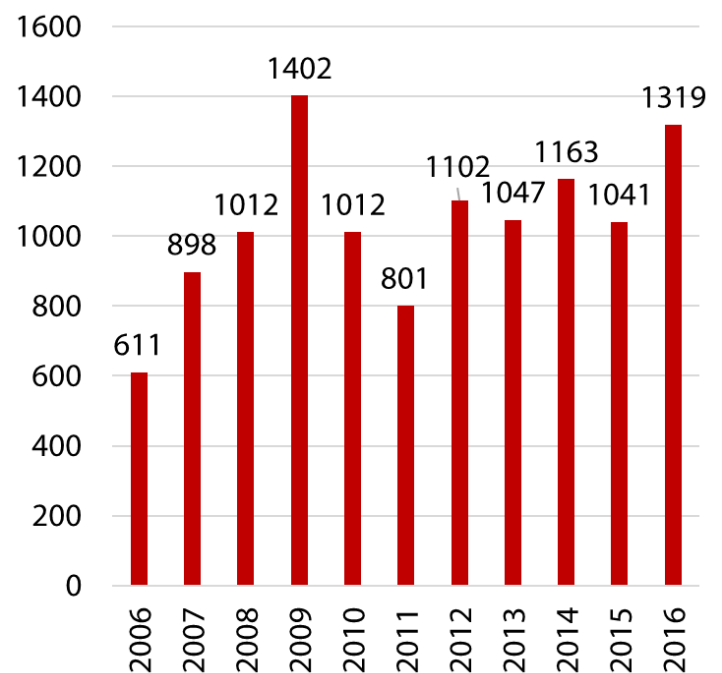
TRANSITION

- Interim cash & medical assistance
- Employment, language, medical services

Source: Department of Health & Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement

Refugees in Utah: Approximately 60,000 Refugees live in Utah. The vast majority reside in Salt Lake County and represent countries such as Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Iraq, Vietnam, the former Soviet Union and Burma. Salt Lake City schools with large refugee populations report over 30 languages spoken.

Figure 1
Refugee Arrivals to Utah per Year



Source: Refugee Processing Center

Who helps refugees resettle in Utah? In Utah there are two resettlement agencies: The International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Catholic Community Services (CCS). The resettlement agency is the most important source of information and assistance during the refugees’ first months in the United States. The resettlement agency ensures that refugees are welcomed at the airport; arranges for their housing, furniture and basic household supplies; conducts orientation; and prepares a resettlement plan, which includes referrals to social services and employment.