

Refugees in Utah

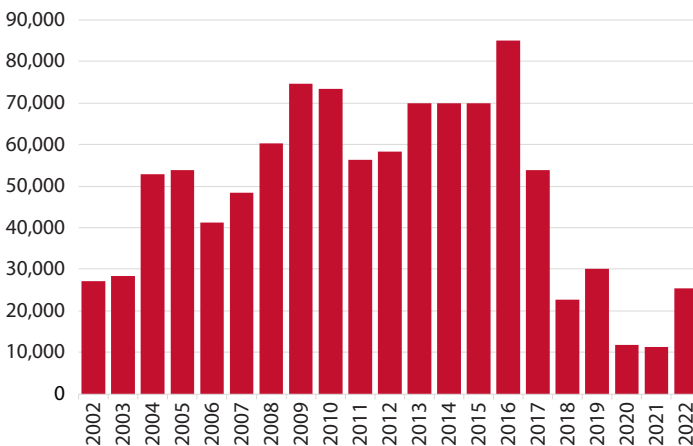
Who is considered a refugee?

United States law, which is aligned with international law, defines a refugee as any person who is outside their country of nationality or habitation and “is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”¹ A person who meets this definition can be considered for refugee status if they are located outside of the United States or asylum status if they are already within the United States.² As of May 2022, 100 million people had been displaced worldwide as a result of human rights violations, ethnic cleansing, regime change, war, and many other forms of persecution, conflict, and violence.³

Refugees in the United States

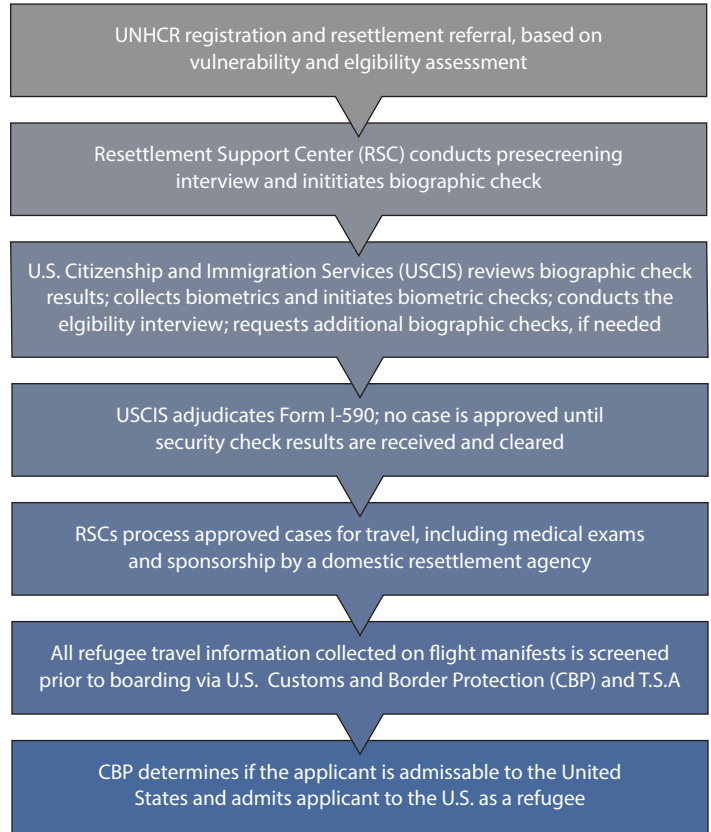
The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN agency mandated to protect and aid refugees and other displaced persons identifies three “durable solutions” that enable refugees to live their lives with dignity and peace. Those solutions include voluntary repatriation, integration within host communities, and resettlement in another country. Of the 20.4 million refugees who are of concern to the UNHCR, less than 1% are submitted for resettlement.⁴

Figure 1: Refugee Arrivals to United States per year, 2002-2022



Note: Year represented is U.S. fiscal year
Source: Refugee Processing Center

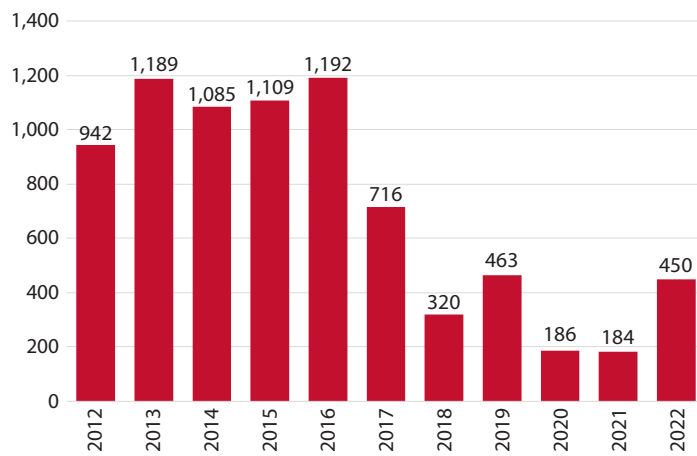
Table 1: General Refugee Process



Note: A person who meets the definition of refugee may be eligible for U.S. resettlement if he or she: Has a particularly compelling history of persecution, is a member of an ethnic or religious group that is considered by the U.S. to be of special humanitarian concern is the spouse, unmarried child or parent of a refugee who has been resettled or is a U.S. permanent resident or an asylee in the U.S.
Source: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Refugees cannot choose the country they would like to resettle in and must wait for the UN Refugee Agency to recommend them to select countries. The United States has been the global leader in resettlement since the 1970s and is typically recommended by the UNHCR for the most vulnerable refugee cases, which include women and children at risk, the elderly, survivors of violence, and those with acute medical needs.⁵ Once a refugee is recommended for resettlement to the United States a rigorous vetting process begins to determine whether to accept the refugee for resettlement. The resettlement process can take months to years as it includes

Figure 2: Refugee Arrivals to Utah per Year, 2012-2022



Note: Year represented is U.S. fiscal year
Source: Refugee Processing Center

screenings by eight different federal agencies, six security database and biometric security checks, medical screenings, and three in-person interviews with Department of Homeland Security officers.⁵ Each year, officials in the U.S. executive branch review refugee admission levels as well as the global refugee situation and create the Presidential Determination, once signed by the president, it establishes refugee admission levels and regional allocations of refugees for the upcoming fiscal year.⁷ The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has resettled around 3.1 million refugees since 1975 and over 500,000 refugees from 2012-2022 (see Figure 1).⁸ Though trends show a downward decline in admission numbers, President Joe Biden signed the Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for FY2023 in September 2022 setting an increased admissions target of 125,000 refugees.⁹

Refugees in Utah

In the years 2012-2017, Utah accepted an average of 1,100 refugees a year. In the years 2018-2022, Utah accepted an

average of 320 refugees a year (see Figure 2). Though there is a significant decrease in the number of refugees admitted, the number of admissions is on average a 1.5% share of the number of refugees admitted to the United States. In 2022, Utah received the majority of its refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Sudan, Afghanistan, Guatemala, and Burma. The UNHCR encourages refugees to be placed into areas with established refugee and diaspora communities. This helps new refugees build connections, adapt easier to their new communities, and easily integrate into a wider social network.¹⁰ This is reflected broadly throughout the county, for example, Salt Lake City and Granite School Districts are both considered minority-majority school districts, with more ethnic minority students than Caucasian students and over 100 languages spoken throughout the districts.^{11,12}

Finding Home in Utah

As previously mentioned, refugees are resettled throughout Utah by two Resettlement Support Centers, Catholic Community Services and the International Rescue Committee.^{13,14} These resettlement agencies provide vital information, programs, and support services that ensure all refugees can have the chance to thrive in Utah. When refugees arrive in Utah they are greeted by caseworkers and volunteers who are ready to help them transition to their new life. Support services can include housing assistance, social services, employment opportunities, access to healthcare, English language classes, legal services, interpretation services, transportation, and small business development classes. Services can last up to two years (and in some cases even longer) and are provided through government agencies and nonprofit organizations.¹⁵ These organizations and others have helped place Utah as a leader in terms of welcoming refugees and helping those that are resettling find community and success in their new homes.¹⁶

Endnotes

1. Immigration and Nationality Act (8 USC § 1101): <https://www.uscis.gov/laws-and-policy/legislation/immigration-and-nationality-act>
2. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/asylum>
3. The UN Refugee Agency: <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/>
4. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees: <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/solutions>
5. USA for UNHCR: <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/usa/>
6. USA for UNHCR: <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/usa/>
7. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/usrap>
8. U.S. Refugee Admissions Program: <https://www.wrapsnet.org/US-Refugee-Admissions-Program/>
9. U.S. Department of State: <https://www.state.gov/the-presidential-determination-on-refugee-admissions-for-fiscal-year-2023/>
10. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees: <https://www.unhcr.org/handbooks/ih/social-connections/promoting-integration-through-social-connections>
11. Salt Lake City School District: <https://www.slcschools.org/schools/district-demographics>
12. Utah State Board of Education: <https://schools.utah.gov/data/reports?mid=1424&tid=4>
13. Catholic Community Services: <https://www.ccsutah.org/programs>
14. International Rescue Center: <https://www.rescue.org/united-states/salt-lake-city-ut>
15. Department of Workforce Services – Refugee Services: <https://jobs.utah.gov/refugee/center/program.html>
16. Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs: <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/refugee-resettlement-in-utah-lessons-on-community-and-religious-engagement>