

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). Refugee status is also defined and protected in international law wherein individuals with refugee status cannot be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom are at risk. 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.

Refugees in the United States

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) identifies one of three “durable solutions” for the over 25 million refugees who have fled or been displaced from their homes. The United States is one of more than 30 countries that accept the 1% of refugees that are considered for resettlement. UNCHR

refers qualified refugee applicants¹ to the United States where they undergo a 26-step vetting and arrival process that can take up to 24 months. This process involves multiple federal agencies, multiple security checks and interviews, and a medical screening.

Vetting and Arrival Process:

SECURITY

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

PLACEMENT

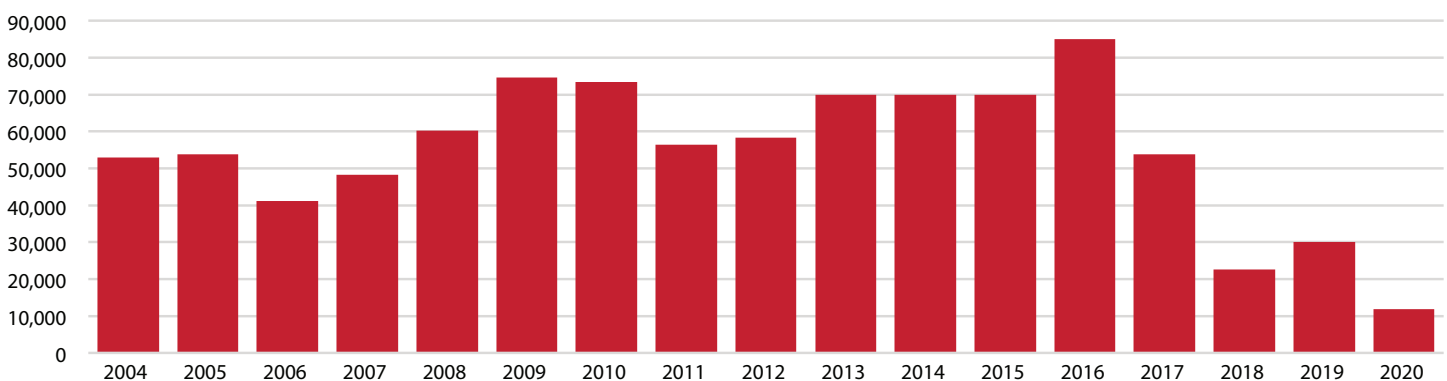
- Placement allocations through 9 national Voluntary Agencies
- Cultural orientation & departure processing
- Initial reception and placement takes 30-90 days

TRANSITION

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

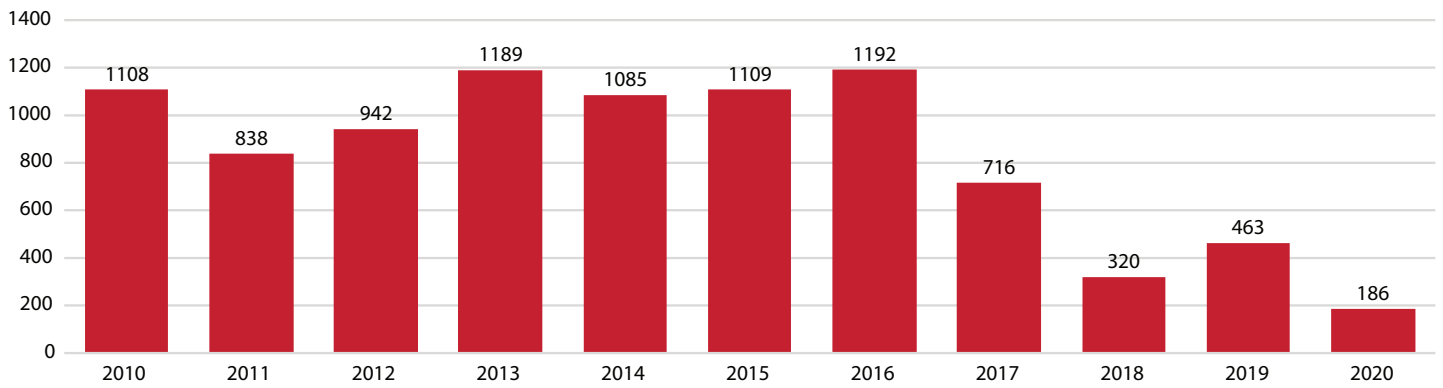
Source: Department of Health & Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement

Figure 1. Refugee Arrivals to United States per Year, 2004-2020



Source: Refugee Processing Center

Figure 2. Refugee Arrivals to Utah per Year, 2010-2020



Note: Arrival number data has changed for Utah since last data retrieval in 2016, so some numbers may not match our 2017 fact sheet.

Source: Refugee Processing Center

The number of refugees resettled to the United States each year is decided by the president and congress. The U.S. has welcomed over 3 million refugees since 1975, with over 600,000 since 2010 (see Figure 1). Over half of the world's refugees are children, and children comprise 30-35% of refugees resettled in the U.S. Refugees tend to be placed in areas with existing family and cultural ties.

Refugees in Utah

Refugees from all over the world have built new lives, homes and communities in every state, including Utah.

Approximately 60,000 refugees live in Utah. In recent years, refugee arrivals to Utah decreased from about 1,100 per year to an average of 400 (see Figure 2). The vast majority of Utah refugees 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.

Finding Home in Utah

Refugees to Utah are guided by two resettlement agencies, the International Rescue Committee and Catholic Community Services. Resettlement agencies are their main sources for information and assistance during the first few years in the United States. The resettlement agency welcomes new arrivals at the airport, arranges for their housing, furniture and basic household supplies, provides orientation and further training, and prepares a resettlement plan which includes referrals to social services and employment. Together, these and local government agencies offer ongoing case management, job placement, interpretation services, classes, transportation, and housing and food assistance.

Sources:

United Nations Commission on Human Rights: <https://www.unhcr.org/>

United States Department of Health & Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/about>

Utah Department of Workforce Services, Refugee Services: <https://jobs.utah.gov/refugee/>

International Rescue Committee of Salt Lake City: <https://www.rescue.org/united-states/salt-lake-city-ut>

Catholic Community Services: <https://www.ccsutah.org/>

Refugee Processing Center: <https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>

Endnotes

1. Refugees eligible for U.S. resettlement meet a particular criteria that includes either a compelling history of persecution, being a member of an ethnic or religious group that is of special humanitarian concern, or is the spouse, child, or parent of a resettled refugee or asylee.