



INFORMATION SHEET: REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

Resettlement to the United States is a long process that can take months, or even years. U.S. resettlement is voluntary and refugees must decide for themselves whether relocating to the U.S. is the right choice for them and their families. Resettlement processing is free of charge to the applicant. However, if you are approved, you will be asked to sign a promissory note for your family's airplane tickets and will be required to repay the cost of the ticket over a period of time after you have arrived in the U.S.

U.S. resettlement processing involves a series of interviews with a number of agencies. Most applicants, but not all, are first interviewed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). If UNHCR refers your case to the U.S., you will then have interviews with staff of a Resettlement Support Center (RSC) RSC working on behalf of the U.S. Department of State, and then with staff of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). You must attend every interview. Only DHS can make the final decision about whether you will be accepted for U.S. resettlement. It is very important that you answer all questions from UNHCR, RSC, and DHS truthfully and honestly. Failure to do so may affect the outcome of your case, or even your status in the United States if discovered in the future. The information you provide to UNHCR, RSC, and DHS will be treated confidentially and shared only with those who will be assisting in your resettlement and have a need to know. For various reasons, DHS may not make an immediate decision on your case.

If there are any changes in your contact information, status in the country of asylum, or family composition, such as birth, death, marriage, or divorce, or if you return to your country of origin at any stage during resettlement processing, it is very important that you inform UNHCR and/or RSC as soon as possible. If you decide at any stage of the process that you are no longer interested in U.S. resettlement, you may withdraw your case by informing either UNHCR or RSC.

If DHS approves your application for U.S. resettlement, you will be required to undergo medical screening conducted by the International Organization for Migration or a physician designated by the U.S. Embassy. The results of the exam may delay your travel if you are diagnosed with a disease or condition that must be treated prior to departure, such as tuberculosis. Following successful completion of your treatment, you will be able to proceed to the U.S. It is important that you answer questions truthfully during the medical exam so that the best possible placement decisions are made to ensure the availability of any medical treatment you may require in your resettlement location.

Depending on how you have gained access to the program, it is not necessarily required that you know anyone in the United States. If you have relatives in the U.S. with whom you wish to be reunited, it is very important that you inform RSC as early in the process as possible. This information is of benefit in planning for your arrival. Every effort is made to resettle you in the same city as your relatives who already live in the U.S., although this is not guaranteed. Please note that the practice of polygamy is illegal in the U.S.

Every refugee family is assigned to a non-governmental organization that will assist you upon arrival in the U.S. The initial assistance you receive for housing, household supplies, and furniture is very basic. Many items such as clothing and furniture may be used, or very inexpensive, but all items provided will be clean and in good condition.

It is important that you cooperate with the resettlement plan that you and your resettlement agency develop together. You will be assisted with your job search wherever you are resettled. Finding employment in the U.S. may take some time and your first job will probably not be in the same profession or field as your job in your home country. It may be an entry level non-professional job, and may even be



temporary or part-time. The cost of living and availability of public support varies throughout the United States. The assistance that is provided to you will not be identical to that provided refugees in other states. Public transportation is available in most U.S. cities. Cars are not provided as part of the resettlement process.

FURTHER INFORMATION TO CONSIDER REGARDING LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

Admission to the United States as a refugee allows you to reside there permanently and eventually to apply for citizenship. Your decision to resettle in the United States does not eliminate the possibility of return to your home country at any time but doing so could affect your status in the U.S.

The United States is a diverse country of more than 300 million people. While ethnic communities exist, most Americans reside in communities that are mixed. It is likely that your neighbors, colleagues, and classmates will be of different races, religions, ethnicities, and lifestyles.

Refugees enjoy the same rights as others living in the United States, including freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and freedom of movement. You cannot be arrested or imprisoned for expressing an opinion, practicing your religion, or meeting with a group of your friends.

Most Americans value self-reliance and hard work. They expect newcomers to find jobs as soon as possible and to take care of themselves and their families. Cash and other assistance provided to refugees by the government generally is not enough to fully support a family. Knowing English is important for success in the U.S. You might be able to find work if you do not speak English, but your job opportunities will be limited. There are opportunities to study English in most communities, but you will also be expected to work.

Public education is free from kindergarten through grade 12. Education is mandatory for children ages 6 to 16 in most states. Parents may also enroll children in private schools (including religiously-affiliated schools) but tuition at these schools is often expensive. The cost of university education can be substantial. To help pay for their education, many university students also have jobs, seek scholarships, or take loans which they must repay after they graduate.

Refugees resettled in the U.S. are eligible for at least eight months of government-provided health care. Health care can be expensive and individuals, not the government, are normally responsible for paying for health services. Those without health insurance will not be refused emergency treatment. Most people rely on insurance programs at least partially financed by their employer, but many entry-level jobs do not offer health insurance coverage. Most recently-legislated changes in the American health care system will not become effective for another year or more.

Many refugees who resettle in the U.S. report that one of the most difficult adjustments is to changes in traditional family roles. In many families, both the husband and the wife need to work. In many instances, children learn English and adapt to life in the U.S. more quickly than their parents. The process of adjusting to these and other changes is different for each person and can cause significant stress to individuals and families. You should seek the assistance of your resettlement agency in obtaining help during this exciting but sometimes difficult period. *More than three million refugees have come to the U.S. in the last 35 years. Resettlement in any new country presents challenges, but most refugees have successfully adapted to life in their new communities and found new opportunities for themselves and their families.*