

Lane County Refugee Assistance Program **Frequently Asked Questions - May 2016**

Refugee resettlement is a tenet of US foreign policy. It is also a place where foreign policy and local public policy intersect. “United States policy allows refugees of special humanitarian concern entrance into our country, reflecting our core values and our tradition of being a safe haven for the oppressed.” (US Office of Refugee Resettlement, Brief History of the Office of Refugee Resettlement, July 2013)

1. How are refugees referred to the U.S. for placement?

The process begins with a referral from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The UN’s refugee agency is responsible for registering refugees around the world, and providing aid and assistance until they are either resettled abroad or returned home once conditions ease. The number of refugees registered with the UNHCR for 2015 was over 15 million, the highest level in 20 years. The registration process includes in-depth refugee interviews, home country reference checks, and biometric screening, in order to weed out military combatants.

Among those who pass these background checks, a small percentage is referred for overseas resettlement, based on criteria designed to determine the most vulnerable cases. This group may include survivors of torture, victims of sexual violence, targets of political persecution, the medically needy, and families with multiple children where there is a female head of household.

2. What happens once a refugee is referred to the U.S.?

Our government performs its own intensive screening, a process that includes consultation from nine different government agencies. These agencies meet weekly to review a refugee’s case file and, if appropriate, determine where in the U.S. the individual should be placed. When choosing where to place a refugee, officials consider factors such as existing family in the U.S., employment possibilities, and special factors such as access to needed medical treatment.

3. Some people worry that members of terrorist groups are trying to sneak into Europe by posing as refugees. How do we know such unwanted individuals aren’t being brought to the U.S. as refugees?

All refugees taken in by the U.S. undergo extensive background checks, first by the UNHCR (see #1 above) and then by the U.S. government. Syrian refugees are subject to additional layers of security screening. “Of all categories of persons entering the U.S., these refugees are the single most heavily screened and vetted,” explains Jana Mason, a senior advisor to the UNHCR.

Multiple law enforcement, intelligence, and security agencies perform “the most rigorous screening of any traveler to the U.S.,” according to a senior administration official. Among the nine different government agencies involved are the State Department, the FBI’s Terrorist Screening Center, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Homeland Security. A DHS officer conducts in-person interviews with every applicant. Biometric information such as fingerprints are collected and matched against criminal databases. Biographical information such as past visa applications are scrutinized to ensure the applicant’s story coheres.

These exhaustive security checks require 18–24 months on average and have an extremely successful record. Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the U.S. has admitted some 785,000 refugees. None has been arrested on domestic terrorism charges, although two—a pair of Iraqis in Kentucky—were charged with terrorist activities connected to aiding al-Qaeda.

4. Who are the refugees?

Refugees are coming to the United States from many countries, including Afghanistan, Burma, Mali, Uganda, and Iraq, as well as Syria. According to senior administration officials, roughly half the refugees admitted are children. Around 25% are adults over 60. Only 2% of those admitted are single males of “combat age.”

5. How many refugees have already been resettled in the U.S., and how many will be coming in the near future?

About 70,000 refugees have been resettled over the past year. They’ve been placed in dozens of states across the country, but most are in big states with large immigrant populations, such as California, Texas, Illinois, and Michigan. Up to 85,000 refugees are expected to be admitted to the U.S. during 2016.

6. How many refugee families will come to Lane County?

There is a limit of 35 refugees (individual family members) per year, pending the success of the first year of the program. This number is set by the Remote Placement Program (RPP), established in a joint agreement between the Catholic Community Services of Lane County (CCSLC) and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/ Migration and Refugee Service. At the maximum, this would mean approximately 10 families per year, depending on family size.

7. Why can’t the refugee program managed by Catholic Charities in Portland also oversee refugee placement in Lane County?

The refugee program in Portland has been operating for about 60 years. However, U.S. State Department rules prohibit all urban refugee resettlement programs, such as Catholic Charities in Portland, from managing refugee placements that are more than 100 miles distant. Catholic

Community Services of Lane County has recently been certified as a Remote Placement Program. The Portland agency is providing guidance and assistance to the new remote site in Eugene-Springfield.

8. Why is there a need for refugee placement assistance in Lane County?

The refugees who will be resettled in Lane County are part of the “U.S. Ties” program. This program reunites refugees with family members who are already living here. Several refugees are already living in Lane County. The State Department seeks to reunite families rather than to place refugees in settings where they may feel more isolated.

9. How will the Lane County refugee program be funded?

Under the agreement between the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Service (the nation’s largest resettlement agency) and Catholic Community Services of Lane County, the Remote Placement Program provides limited funding for direct assistance to refugee families as well as towards the cost of case management services for a period of 30–90 days. CCSLC is seeking additional fundraising support from the community, to help refugee families until their English-language skills and job skills allow them to be self-supporting. CCSLC is committed to raising this additional support without taking away any funding from its existing programs and services.

10. Why bring refugees here when Lane County already has a large population of people living in poverty?

Many of the refugees are escaping from war-torn regions where their lives and the lives of their family members are in danger as a result of the violence in their homelands. These refugees have been forced to leave their homes and are in need of a safe place to live. They have already been approved to come to the United States and therefore may be thought of as a part of our existing community.

Catholic Community Services of Lane County and volunteers are not choosing between poverty among local citizens and providing refugee assistance. The two are not mutually exclusive. CCSLC and volunteers can act both locally and globally, helping all groups who are in need.

Studies have shown that people who help one population in need gain insights that enable them to provide even more effective help to a second group. Volunteers gain understanding and deepen perspective as they engage in this work.

11. How will the refugee program help the refugee families arriving in Lane County?

The program, administered by Catholic Community Services of Lane County (CCSLC), will ensure that arriving refugees are:

- met at the airport
- provided a safe place to stay temporarily
- helped with locating permanent housing, food, and other necessities
- provided cultural orientation and interpretation assistance as needed
- assisted with all paperwork associated with establishing residency in the U.S.
- supported in enrolling their children in school
- given assistance towards helping adult refugees find employment and become self-supporting as soon as possible

12. I'd like to help. How can I find out more about assisting with refugee resettlement in Lane County?

Volunteer registration forms and more information about getting involved are available at www.ccslc.org/refugee-resettlement-program

- Thanks to *Time* magazine, <http://time.com/4116619/syran-refugees> , for information on the U.S. screening process, and to <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/refugees-fact-sheet> for statistics on refugees in the United States.