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# THE POLICY CIRCLE RESPONDING TO REFUGEE CRISES





# REFUGEE CRISES WORLDWIDE



ACCORDING TO THE UNITED NATION'S 1951 CONVENTION ON REFUGEES, A REFUGEE IS A PERSON WHO LEAVES THEIR HOME COUNTRY BECAUSE OF PERSECUTION OR A JUSTIFIABLE FEAR OF PERSECUTION ON THE BASIS ON THEIR RACE, RELIGION, NATIONALITY, POLITICAL OPINIONS, OR MEMBERSHIP IN A PARTICULAR SOCIAL GROUP.

AN ASYLUM SEEKER IS A PERSON SEEKING OUT PROTECTION IN ANOTHER COUNTRY WHO HAS NOT YET RECEIVED FORMAL PROTECTION OR LEGAL RECOGNITION OF THEIR STATUS. THE UNITED NATION'S UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS LAYS OUT A BASIC RIGHT TO SEEK ASYLUM IN ANOTHER COUNTRY BECAUSE OF A WELL-FOUNDED FEAR OF PERSECUTION.

VARIOUS CRISES INCLUDING THOSE IN UKRAINE, AFGHANISTAN, VENEZUELA, SYRIA, AND YEMEN HAVE LED TO THE LARGEST NUMBER OF REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS WORLDWIDE SINCE WWII.

# ➤ AMERICAN ASSISTANCE FOR REFUGEES ◀


THE FIRST U.S. LEGISLATION RELATED TO REFUGEES, THE 1948 DISPLACED PERSONS ACT, WAS PASSED TO HELP RESETTLE EUROPEAN REFUGEES IN THE US WHO HAD BEEN DISPLACED BY WORLD WAR 2 OR FLED POLITICAL PERSECUTION IN THE COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED EASTERN BLOC.

PRIVATE CONTRACTORS, NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS, AND LOCAL VOLUNTEERS PLAY KEY ROLES IN THE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS. THERE ARE NINE RESETTLEMENT AGENCIES THAT ARE CONTRACTED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO RESETTLE REFUGEES, INCLUDING CATHOLIC CHARITIES AND INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE. THESE MAIN AGENCIES ALSO WORK WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL.

U.S. REFUGEE POLICY WAS MADE ON AN AS-NEEDED BASIS UNTIL THE REFUGEE CRISIS THAT RESULTED AFTER THE 1975 FALL OF SOUTH VIETNAM. THE RESULTING 1980 REFUGEES ACT STREAMLINED AMERICA'S REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS. SINCE THEN, MORE THAN 3.7 MILLION REFUGEES HAVE BEEN SETTLED IN THE UNITED STATES.



THE UNITED NATION'S REFUGEE AGENCY, THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR), RESETTLES REFUGEES IN COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD THAT AGREE TO TAKE THEM IN. IN THE U.S., THE PRESIDENT SETS THE MAXIMUM NUMBER OF REFUGEES THAT THE U.S. WILL ADMIT, AND DIVIDES THIS TOTAL AMONG EACH REGION OF THE WORLD.

# ➤ GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT ◀



AT LEAST HALF A DOZEN FEDERAL AGENCIES ARE INVOLVED IN THE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY'S U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP SERVICES (USCIS) PROCESSES ASYLUM CLAIMS AND SCREENS REFUGEES. THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES'S OFFICE OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROVIDES SOCIAL SERVICES FOR REFUGEES IN THE U.S.


THE HOUSE JUDICIARY SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP, AND SENATE JUDICIARY SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP, AND BORDER SECURITY OVERSEE THE IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE-RELATED ACTIVITIES OF AGENCIES LIKE THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, AND EXERCISE CONGRESS'S RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE LAWS REGARDING IMMIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP, AND REFUGEES.



THE U.S. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM (USRAP) IS AN INTERAGENCY EFFORT THAT INVOLVES MULTIPLE GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT PARTNERS FROM ABROAD, SUCH AS UNHCR, AND WITHIN THE U.S.

THE U.S. ALSO HAS TWO PATHS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS. ASYLUM SEEKERS CAN APPLY FOR AFFIRMATIVE ASYLUM WITHIN ONE YEAR OF ARRIVING IN THE U.S. OR AT A U.S. PORT OF ENTRY, OR DEFENSIVELY IF THEY ARE INELIGIBLE FOR AFFIRMATIVE ASYLUM OR ARE PLACED IN DEPORTATION PROCEEDINGS.

STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS PLAY A LARGE ROLE HELPING REFUGEES BUILD NEW LIVES IN THE U.S. REFUGEES' ABILITY TO ACCESS JOBS, HOUSING, AND SOCIAL SERVICES LIKE ENGLISH CLASSES DEPENDS ON COORDINATION OF FUNDING FROM THE FEDERAL OFFICE OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT (ORR) WITH LOCAL LEVEL RESOURCES.



# ➤ FRAMING THE ISSUE ◀

## OVERSTRETCHED NONPROFIT RESOURCES

LOCAL REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AGENCIES THAT WORK WITH AROUND 45,000 REFUGEES PER YEAR HAVE BEEN OVERWHELMED BY THE NEED TO INTEGRATE THE 75,000 AFGHANS EVACUATED FROM KABUL IN SUMMER 2021. NONPROFITS LIKE CATHOLIC CHARITIES RECEIVE SMALL FEDERAL GRANTS AND STIPENDS, BUT THESE HAVE NOT INCREASED IN RESPONSE RECENT REFUGEE CRISES .

## REFUGEES AND THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET

A COMMON CONCERN IS THE IDEA THAT IMMIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND ASYUM SEEKERS RECEIVE FAR MORE IN GOVERNMENT BENEFITS THAN THEY PAY IN TAXES. A 2022 STUDY FOUND THAT THE TYPICAL IMMIGRANT CONSUMES 30% LESS IN GOVERNMENT BENEFITS THAN THE AVERAGE NATIVE-BORN AMERICAN. THIS IS MAINLY BECAUSE IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES TEND TO BE MUCH YOUNGER THAN NATIVE-BORN AMERICANS AND LESS LIKELY TO RECEIVE MEDICARE OR SOCIAL SECURITY WHILE STILL CONTRIBUTING ECONOMICALLY.

## STATE AND LOCAL INPUT

SOME STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FEEL THAT THEY DON'T RECEIVE SUFFICIENT LEVELS OF FEDERAL FUNDING TO RESETTLE REFUGEES. LANDLORDS ARE OFTEN HESITANT TO ACCEPT REFUGEES WHO DO NOT YET HAVE JOBS OR A PERMANENT RESIDENCY STATUS, AND IT CAN BE CHALLENGING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO PROVIDE JOB TRAINING AND SOCIAL SERVICES FOR REFUGEES.

## RESPONDING TO REFUGEE CRISES ACROSS THE WORLD

LESS THAN 1% OF THE WORLD'S 84 MILLION REFUGEES ARE PERMANENTLY RESETTLED IN A THIRD COUNTRY LIKE THE U.S. OR CANADA. MOST REFUGEES FLEEING VIOLENT CONFLICTS END UP IN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES, WITH SYRIAN REFUGEES CROSSING THE BORDER INTO TURKEY AND VENEZUELAN'S FLEEING TO COLOMBIA. MANY OF THESE PEOPLE ARE TRAPPED IN REFUGEE CAMPS FOR YEARS ON END AND DEPENDENT ON INTERNATIONAL AID TO SURVIVE BECAUSE THEY LACK THE LEGAL RIGHT TO WORK, START A BUSINESS, OR EDUCATE THEIR CHILDREN IN THE COUNTRY THEY HAVE FLED TO.



# ➤ SOLUTIONS ◀

## MATCHING REFUGEES' SKILLS AND EDUCATION WITH JOB OPPORTUNITIES

WHEN INDIVIDUALS FLEE THEIR HOMES TO ESCAPE CONFLICT OR PERSECUTION, THEY ARE EITHER FORCED TO LEAVE WITHOUT EVIDENCE OF THE EDUCATION AND SKILLS THEY HAVE, OR THEIR DEGREES AND LICENSES ARE NOT RECOGNIZED OUTSIDE OF THEIR COUNTRY. ONLINE LEARNING SITES LIKE COURSERA HAVE MADE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES AND TECHNICAL SKILLS COURSES FREE FOR REFUGEES. COMMUNITY COLLEGES, TRADE SCHOOLS, AND EMPLOYERS ALL HAVE A ROLE IN HELPING REFUGEES ACQUIRE THE JOB SKILLS AND FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS THEY NEED TO SUCCEED IN THE U.S. AND CONTRIBUTE ECONOMICALLY.

## INVESTMENT IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

A NUMBER OF ACTORS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, SUCH AS UPWARDLY GLOBAL, ARE WORKING ON SUPPORTING REFUGEES WHO FACE LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES SUCH AS TAKING CARE OF DEPENDENTS OR FINDING TRANSPORTATION; PROVIDING ESL CLASSES GEARED TOWARDS THE WORKPLACE; CREATING FAST-TRACKED PROGRAMS TO HELP THOSE WITH EXPERIENCE GAIN NECESSARY CREDENTIALS; AND INCENTIVES FOR EMPLOYEES TO PARTICIPATE IN NETWORKING EVENTS.

## ADDRESSING THE BACKLOG OF ASYLUM CASES

AS OF 2022, THERE IS A BACKLOG OF 670,000 ASYLUM CASES WAITING TO BE HEARD, WITH AN AVERAGE WAIT TIME OF FOUR TO FIVE YEARS. U.S. LAW REQUIRES THAT A CASE BE HEARD WITHIN 180 DAYS, AND IF NO DECISION IS MADE THE INDIVIDUAL AUTOMATICALLY RECEIVES AUTHORIZATION TO WORK IN THE U.S., BUT IS STILL LEFT IN A LEGAL LIMBO.

REFORMS LIKE DIGITIZING CASE RECORDS AND CREATING A DEDICATED SET OF IMMIGRATION COURTS FOR ASYLUM CASES CAN HELP REDUCE THIS BACKLOG.

# ➤ WHAT YOU CAN DO ◀

## MEASURE -

FIND OUT WHAT YOUR STATE AND CITY ARE DOING ABOUT WELCOMING REFUGEES. DO YOU KNOW WHERE REFUGEES ARE LOCATED IN YOUR STATE OR CITY? IS THERE A NEARBY MILITARY BASE THAT HAS HOUSED REFUGEE FAMILIES? HOW ARE REFUGEES INTEGRATED INTO THE COMMUNITY? WHAT PROJECTS AND AGENCIES EXIST, OR DOES ONE NEED TO BE FORMED?



## IDENTIFY -

WHAT ARE THE LOCAL AGENCIES WORKING WITH REFUGEES IN YOUR STATE OR CITY?  
WHAT ORGANIZATIONS WORK WITH REFUGEES IN YOUR STATE OR CITY?  
ARE LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES PARTICULARLY INVOLVED IN WELCOMING REFUGEES?  
HOW ARE CHILDREN OF REFUGEES WELCOMED AND INTEGRATED IN THE SCHOOLS IN YOUR DISTRICT?



## REACH OUT -

FIND ALLIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR IN NEARBY TOWNS AND ELSEWHERE IN THE STATE. FOSTER COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT, FIRST RESPONDERS, FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, LOCAL HOSPITALS, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, SCHOOL BOARDS, LOCAL BUSINESSES, ETC.

## PLAN -

SET SOME MILESTONES BASED ON YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD MEETING CALENDAR



## EXECUTE -

VISIT AN ORGANIZATION THAT WORKS WITH REFUGEES, AND PERHAPS OFFER TO HELP AS A MENTOR, TUTOR, OR JUST SUPPORT. FOR EXAMPLE IN CHICAGO, WORLD EXODUS AND CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAVE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS.  
DETERMINE WHERE THE GAPS ARE IN WELCOMING REFUGEES IN YOUR STATE OR CITY, OR LOCAL SCHOOL AND PLACE OF WORSHIP.