

# Welcoming Refugees | What you need to know about refugees in South Carolina

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as 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 nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

**South Carolina will become home to a projected 220 refugees (statewide) in FY 2016.**<sup>1</sup> This is .3% of the refugees who will be resettled in the US in FY 2016 and a tiny part of the more than 60,000,000 displaced and stateless people worldwide.<sup>2</sup>

**The US refugee screening and security process takes between 24 and 36 months.** Refugee screening is more rigorous than any other immigrant-screening category. It is also the most rigorous refugee security screening process in the world. In comparison, Canada's screening process only takes an average of 4 months. In the US, persons who have participated in war crimes, violations of humanitarian and human rights law, and terrorism are ineligible for refugee status.<sup>3</sup>

**Refugee resettlement is not a new process in the US.** The first official federal resettlement program in the United States was in 1792. It cost \$15,000 (of a \$6 million budget) and assisted 100,000 refugees.<sup>4</sup>

**Refugees are an economic benefit to cities and states.** For every dollar (\$1) of federal money spent on resettlement, states and cities see an average return of between \$3 and \$8. Cities and states that invest in resettlement see more: Cleveland, for example, sees a return of \$10 for every \$1 of federal money used in resettlement.<sup>5</sup>

**Voluntary agencies facilitate refugee integration.** Voluntary agencies contract with the US government to help refugees transition into life in the US for the first few months after arrival. Refugees are screened and selected by the US government, not voluntary agencies. Refugees pay for their own travel to the US.<sup>6</sup>

**Refugees achieve high levels of economic and social integration.** Refugees enter the US with similar education levels as US-born adults.<sup>7</sup> This facilitates adaptation to US society, including: job placement; high levels of small business and home ownership;<sup>8</sup> and long-term economic outcomes similar to US-born citizens.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Office of Refugee Resettlement FY 2016 Projections: <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/docsforcongress/247770.htm>

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR FY 2015 mid-year report data. <http://www.unhcr.org/56701b969.html>

<sup>3</sup> Caps et al. 2015. The Integration Outcomes of US Refugees: Successes and Challenges. Migration Policy Institute: Washington, D.C.; M. Foged and E Perry. 2014. Immigrants and Native Workers: New Analysis Using Longitudinal Employer-Employee Data. National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>4</sup> Byrnes, M. 2015. A Brief History of American Attitudes Toward Refugees. (Unpublished) Wofford College.

<sup>5</sup> Chmura Associates. 2013. Economic Impact of Refugees. Report to Cleveland City Council.

<sup>6</sup> State Department. 2015. Refugee Reception and Placement. <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/receptionplacement/>

<sup>7</sup> Caps et al. 2015. The Integration Outcomes of US Refugees: Successes and Challenges. Migration Policy Institute: Washington, D.C.

<sup>8</sup> US Federal Reserve. 2015. Report: A Commentary on Immigrant and Refugee Entrepreneurs.

<sup>9</sup> Caps and Fix. 2015. Ten Facts about U.S. Refugee Resettlement. Migration Policy Institute: Washington, D.C.; U.S. Department of Education Data and US Census Data State by State Analysis. 2013.