



A Refugee's Journey to the United States

Finding hope in a new home

Wisconsin has over 75,000 Refugees living in communities across the state. These individuals were forced to flee their home country to escape persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Learn about their journey* to the United States (U.S.) and the supports in place to help them thrive in their new community.

- 1 Refugee Flees Persecution in Their Country of Origin**
Refugee flees to another, neighboring country to escape persecution.
- 2 Refugee Applies to the U.S. for Admission**
While in the neighboring country, the Refugee works with the International Organization for Migration and other authorized authorities to apply to resettle in the U.S. Those authorities refer the Refugee's case to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.
- 3 U.S. Refugee Admissions Program Processes the Application**
During the application process, the Refugee undergoes security screenings by multiple U. S. security agencies, interviews with the Department of Homeland Security, and a health screening to identify any medical concerns.
- 4 Case is Approved for Resettlement by the U.S. Government**
The federal government reviews the Refugee's application for approval.
- 5 Refugee's Case is Assigned to a National Resettlement Agency**
The Department of State coordinates the assignment of the case to one of nine U.S.-based private refugee resettlement agencies with local affiliate agencies in communities across the U.S.

Wisconsin History

The first refugees to arrive to Wisconsin were Hmong from Laos in the 1970s. Since the year 2000, over 16,000 refugees have been resettled in the state of Wisconsin from 50 different countries. Since 2000, around two thirds of arriving refugees have been resettled in Milwaukee County, though there are resettlement and partner agencies scattered throughout the state. After the Hmong population, some of the largest refugee groups living in Wisconsin include Burmese, Somali, Bosnian, Congolese, and Iraqi.

Today, the majority of refugees in Wisconsin have achieved economic self-sufficiency—working and contributing to our communities!

* Individuals who arrived in the U.S. as part of Operation Allies Refuge in 2021 may have variations in their resettlement process as determined by federal agencies.



- 6 The Resettlement Agency Allocates the Refugee's Case to a Location in the U.S.**
The resettlement agency uses the background information provided by the Refugee – including family connections in the U.S. – to assign their case to a specific city in the U.S. The resettlement agency informs its local affiliate in the selected city, which will assist the Refugee upon arrival.
- 7 The Refugee is Informed of the Resettlement Location in the U.S.**
The Refugee receives an entry visa and flights to the U.S., as well as cultural orientations to help them prepare for life in the U.S.
- 8 The Local Affiliate Prepares for the Refugee's Arrival**
In Wisconsin, there are four resettlement agencies that have local affiliates. These include International Institute of Wisconsin, which resettles Refugees in the Milwaukee area; Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, which resettles Refugees in the Milwaukee area; World Relief of Fox Valley, which resettles Refugees in the Oshkosh and Appleton areas; and Jewish Social Services, which resettles Refugees in Dane County.
- 9 Refugee Arrives in the U.S.**
The local affiliate meets the Refugee (and their family) at the airport and helps them transition to life in the U.S. This includes housing, applying for public benefits, emergency cash, and referral to other programs that provide necessary services. One year after arrival, the Refugee and their family may become Lawful Permanent Residents. Five years after arrival, they may become U.S. Citizens.
- 10 Refugee is Eligible for Additional Services Provided by the State of Wisconsin**
Refugees may enroll in social, employment, and educational programs administered by the Department of Children and Families' Bureau of Refugee Programs and funded by the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement. DCF currently contracts with a number of organizations to provide services to refugees. As needed, refugees are also referred to other public benefits programs, such as W-2, FoodShare, and BadgerCare Plus.

How Can I Help?

Refugees arrive with little beyond the clothes they are wearing and often are very unfamiliar with American ways of life. You can make a real difference by offering your time, skills and gifts to help welcome new Wisconsin residents from a refugee background. Learn more at www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/refugee/help

