



Who Brings Refugees to South Dakota?

Currently there are an estimated 35 million people from around the world who have fled their homes because of religious, political and racial persecution. These people are the world's refugees. The U.S. Government, as determined by the President of the United States, allowed 60,014 refugees to enter our country last year. Approximately half of the refugees resettled in the U.S. are under 18 years old.

Why Does the U.S. Resettle Refugees?

The U.S. is one of many countries around the world that is committed to resettling refugees as a part of a global humanitarian mission. This mission began after WWII when the U.S. resettled more than 250,000 displaced Europeans. According to the U.S. Department of State: "The U.S. refugee resettlement program reflects the United States' highest values and aspirations to compassion, generosity, and leadership."

Why Does LSS Participate in Resettlement?

LSS participates in resettlement because it is an important part of our mission, it is the right thing to do, and we have a proven record of success at providing resettlement services. As early as 1948, LSS began with a vision to provide resettlement services to displaced people from Europe following World War II. While the origin of populations resettled shifts depending on current global conflicts, LSS continues to provide these services as a part of its mission. Resettlement work is not profitable. Grants received from the federal government cover the cost of staff to provide orientation, case management, employment services, English Language training and other services to help new arrivals become self-sufficient. Each year, LSS must raise contributed income to make up the difference between the expenses of the program and available grant funding. LSS is nationally recognized for the quality and effectiveness of its resettlement services. Client outcome measurements for employment and self-sufficiency demonstrate the strength of LSS resettlement efforts.

Who Decides How Many Refugees Arrive Locally?

LSS works with local partners and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service to determine how many individuals arrive in South Dakota each year. This calculation begins with the presidential determination of how many refugees will be allowed into the U.S. Factors considered in determining how many arrivals will arrive locally include the strength of the economy, the unemployment rate, housing availability, and overall quality of life. Without strong indicators in these areas, refugees are unlikely to be successful. LSS helped resettle 206 refugees in South Dakota in FFY2023. This is less than .5% of the total population of refugees resettled in the U.S.

What is the Difference Between a Refugee and an Immigrant?

Immigrants choose to leave their homes and come to the U.S. whereas refugees flee their homes because they are afraid for their personal safety. Refugees are unable to return home because of persecution. Immigrants may come to the U.S. with temporary visas, allowing them to remain for a certain period of time or under certain conditions (such as students or tourists), or they may have permission allowing them to remain indefinitely. Refugees arrive with temporary residency and may apply for legal permanent residency after one year. After five years, legal permanent residents may apply for U.S. citizenship. All refugees arrive eligible for employment.

Understanding Refugees & the Process

Coming to the U.S. as a refugee is a thorough process and may take up to ten years or more. People do not seek to be part of the world's refugee population. Tragically, it starts simply by running because their lives are being threatened. Safety is often sought in another country after traveling hundreds of miles and enduring unheard of circumstances. The next step is to apply to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) for protection. If approved, refugees are assigned to a refugee camp. Some individuals and families live in refugee camps for many years before being accepted for resettlement into another country. At every step of this process, these individuals are terrified and at risk of being returned to their original countries. Eventually, some are allowed to meet with U.S. government officials to compile personal information and conduct numerous security checks. This takes between 18 months and two years, but if accepted they await an interview with the U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. Many applicants are denied at this point due to inconsistencies in information. Refugees who are accepted are fingerprinted, photographed and subjected to a series of medical checks. Only then, after all

of these steps are successfully completed, are refugees connected with an organization like LSS. When they arrive in communities like Sioux Falls, they often arrive with nothing but the clothes on their back.

What Security Measures Are Taken?

Refugees are screened and go through in-depth background checks prior to receiving refugee status and before resettlement. Information is gathered and interviews are conducted by the United Nation's High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly the INS), the U.S. Department for Homeland Security, FBI and the US Embassy. Visit www.USCIS.gov/refugeescreening for more information.

How Does LSS Help Refugees?

At the request of the state, LSS assumed oversight of refugee resettlement in South Dakota in 2000. The state of South Dakota continues to oversee refugee medical assistance, but LSS has taken the lead in oversight of cash assistance and services. LSS operates refugee resettlement offices in Sioux Falls, Huron, Rapid City and Yankton. The primary goals for all services are self-sufficiency and cultural integration. Core services include:

- Community Orientation & Education
- Case Management
- Employment Services
- English Language Training
- Immigration Services
- Interpreter Services

LSS provides assistance with initial housing and basic needs items. Through federal funding, refugees are eligible for up to eight months of cash assistance to cover basic necessities until self-sufficiency is reached. To receive this funding, employable adults must cooperate with an employment program and case manager, attend at least six hours a week of English language training, and attend 30 hours of community orientation. LSS case management and employment services are available to newcomers for up to five years. All refugees are legally qualified for employment upon arrival. Employment services assist employable adults in finding the first job as well as job upgrades. English language training is available four days and two evenings a week. Classes focus on oral and written English skills. LSS immigration attorneys assist refugees who are pursuing permanent residency or U.S. citizenship.

What is Secondary Migration?

A secondary refugee or secondary migrant is defined as a person who was resettled as a refugee in another state and has moved within the U.S. Secondary migrants may choose to move to South Dakota for many reasons. Some may have family members in South Dakota. Others may be attracted by employment opportunities or because of the high quality of life found here. Secondary migrants are eligible for services from LSS if they have been in the country for less than five years. LSS would only become aware of a secondary migrant if they sought services and were within the five year timeframe. In FFY2023, LSS provided services for 8 secondary migrants.

What Populations Are Currently Being Resettled?

In FFY2023, the three most common refugee populations resettled in South Dakota include refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Sudan.

How Can I Help?

Resettlement efforts are the most successful when they have the support of the local community. Donations of furniture and household items are being accepted to assist newly arrived families in setting up their homes. Volunteers are needed to serve as mentors for new arrivals. Financial contributions are accepted to assist with purchase of basic needs.

For More Information

If you have questions about refugee resettlement in South Dakota, please contact Tim Jurgens, Program Director and State Refugee Coordinator at Tim.Jurgens@lsssd.org or 866-242-2447.

For more information about refugee resettlement in the U.S., visit:

U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration <https://www.state.gov/about-us-bureau-of-population-refugees-and-migration/>