

Who Brings Refugees to South Dakota?

Currently there are approximately 117.3 million people from around the world who have fled their homes because of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing the public order according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Among these displaced people are 36.4 million who have left their home countries seeking safety. These people are the world's refugees. The U.S. Government, as determined by the President of the United States, allowed 38,102 refugees to enter our country last year (FY2025). 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. In 1968 the United States signed the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees as did the majority of nations in the world. 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 Global Refuge (formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service LIRS) 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. in a given year. Then, we recommend how many individuals we believe we can successfully resettle in SD. Factors considered in determining how many refugees will arrive locally include the strength of the local economy, the local unemployment rate, local housing availability, and overall quality of life considering the capacity of local services. Without strong indicators in these areas, refugees are unlikely to be successful. LSS helped resettle 137 refugees in South Dakota in FFY2025. This is less than 0.4% of the total population of refugees resettled in the U.S. in FFY2025.

What is the Difference Between a Refugee and an Immigrant?

Immigrants choose to leave their homes and come to the U.S. or another country, whereas refugees flee their homes because they are afraid for their personal safety and the safety of their families. 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, all legal permanent residents (including refugees) 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 long and difficult process that involves thorough screening and may take up to ten years or more to complete. 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 a nearby country after traveling hundreds of miles and enduring unheard of circumstances, 66% of the world's refugees are hosted in neighboring

countries, but many of these neighboring countries are also developing nations and cannot permanently resettle the new refugees within their borders. 71% of refugees are hosted in low or middle income countries. That is when the UNHCR becomes involved. They run camps for refugees and the next step for a refugee is to apply to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) for protection. If approved, refugees are assigned to a refugee camp and issued an identification card. 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 for the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State. This takes between 18 months and two years minimum. If accepted, they interview with the U.S. 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 through a national voluntary agency such as Global Refuge and the Department of State. When they arrive in communities like Sioux Falls, refugees 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), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (within the Department for Homeland Security), and the Department of State. Biometric and name based background checks are run through US government databases such as DHS, FBI and DOD as well as Interpol. 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 oversight of cash assistance and support services. LSS operates refugee resettlement offices in Sioux Falls, 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 for new arrival refugees. Through federal funding, refugees are also eligible for up to twelve 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, and attend at least three hours a week of English language training, and attend a 30 hour cultural orientation within their first few weeks in country. 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 their first job in the USA as well as job upgrades as they build their resumes and improve their English. English language training is available four days and two evenings a week. Classes focus on oral and written English skills. LSS immigration legal services assist refugees who need help with processes such as permanent residency, replacement documents or U.S. citizenship.

What is a Humanitarian Parolee? What is Welcome Corps? What is Secondary Migration? And What is the Difference?

A *humanitarian parolee* is someone who entered the USA with the permission of the government, through Customs and Border Patrol for a temporary period of time due to humanitarian need or crisis in their home country. Humanitarian parolees are not refugees or asylees, though they may seek to pursue some other humanitarian status such as asylum or Temporary Protected Status if they cannot return home when their temporary period of parole expires. There were a number of pre-authorization parole programs in place under the Biden Administration, including the Uniting for Ukraine program and the Cuban, Haitian, Nicaraguan, Venezuelan or CHVNs program, which have now ended. For more information see <https://www.uscis.gov/ukraine> and <https://www.uscis.gov/CHNV>.

Welcomecorps was a way for private individuals to sponsor refugees in a group of five. The individuals who came to the U.S. through Welcomecorps were refugees just like those that LSS resettles through Global Refuge, except they

were not received by LSS because their sponsors have agreed to help them. The Welcomecorps program was ended in January 2025. You can find out more about Welcomecorps here: <https://welcomecorps.org/>

A *secondary migrant* is a person who was resettled as a refugee in another state and then moved to South Dakota. Secondary migrants and humanitarian parolees may choose to move to South Dakota from a different first state for many reasons. Some may have family members or friends in South Dakota. Others may be attracted by employment opportunities or because of the high quality of life and low cost of living.

Secondary migrants, Welcomecorps arrivals and humanitarian parolees are eligible for services from LSS if they have been in the country for less than five years. However, LSS would only become aware these individuals if they seek services with us for English language training, employment services or other support. In FFY2025, LSS provided services for 160 humanitarian parolees and secondary migrants. South Dakota also had 12 Welcomecorps arrivals. Because these three groups come here outside of our partnership with Global Refuge, we never know who will come or when through these pathways, but we will still do our best to try and help serve these populations with most of our same core services.

What Populations Are Currently Being Resettled?

In FFY2025, the five most common refugee populations resettled in South Dakota include refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea and Nicaragua.

How Can I Help?

Resettlement efforts are the most successful when they have the support of the local community. Donations of bus passes, gas cards, phone cards, grocery store cards, or cash are the most helpful as we have limited gifts in kind due to the uneven flow of arrivals. Volunteers are needed to serve as mentors, Warm Welcome Greeters at our office or to help tutor in classrooms of English Language Learners.

For More Information

If you have questions about refugee resettlement in South Dakota, please contact Dana Boraas, Program Director and State Refugee Coordinator at Dana.Boraas@LssSD.org or 605-731-2000.

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

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement at:

<https://acf.gov/orr/programs/refugees> or UNHCR at <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/data-summaries>.