



Frequently Asked Questions About Refugee Resettlement in North Dakota

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1 Who is a refugee?

A refugee is a person who has been persecuted and often victimized in their own country on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, belonging to certain social groups or having a certain political opinion and has crossed the border to another country.

2 What is the difference between a refugee and an immigrant?

A *refugee* moves to a new country because they have nowhere else to go. They are fleeing persecution and fear for their lives. They must prove that they have been persecuted or have a well-founded fear of persecution.

An *immigrant* is a person who relocates to a new country because they want to and have approval from the new country's government. They can return to their country of origin without fear.

3 Why is the program called "New American Services?"

The term "new American" emphasizes the integrating of refugees into the community, which is the goal of this program. New American Services is a program of Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota.

4 Do refugees come here for a certain limited period of time?

Refugees are here permanently. They may apply for Legal Permanent Resident status (green card) after one year and may apply for citizenship after five years.

5 How many refugees are there?

There are about 12 million refugees in the world today. In recent times, about 75,000 to 80,000 refugees are legally admitted to the United States for resettlement each year; North Dakota receives about 400 of these.

Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota is the only federally-recognized and approved refugee resettlement organization in the state. The agency's New American Services program resettled about 300 refugees in the Fargo / West Fargo area, 80 in Grand Forks and 30 in Bismarck each year for the past two years. The agency has resettled refugees in North Dakota since 1946 and has resettled approximately 4,000 refugees from 35 countries in Fargo and West Fargo during the past 14 years.

6 Who brings refugees to the United States?

The refugee resettlement process begins with the federal government. Each October the President, in consultation with Congress, sets the number of refugees to be admitted here to start a new life. The State Department decides how many refugees will come from various parts of the world.

7 How do refugees come to North Dakota?

The US State Department determines where refugees will be resettled based on housing availability, job possibilities, family connections, etc. The state refugee coordinator, who is currently Sinisa Milovanovic, director of New American Services at Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota, agrees to the number of arrivals each year and must have the capacity to manage the resettlement process. The number is arrived at the agency in consultation with its Refugee Council that meets regularly throughout the year.

The Refugee Council includes representatives of local organizations such as county social services, adult learning center, school districts, healthcare providers, public health agencies and city government. The council provides community insight to New American Services on topics such as ensuring the capacity to provide necessary services to refugees, priorities for services and impact of refugee populations on schools, health care system, transportation and employment opportunities.

8 For how long have refugees been coming to North Dakota?

Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota has been resettling refugees since 1946. The groups served depend on areas of conflict around the globe. Following World War II, the agency worked with refugees from Eastern Europe. In the 1980s, the agency served refugees from Southeast Asia after the fall of Saigon.

9 How is refugee resettlement funded?

Refugee resettlement is primarily funded by the federal government. Lutheran Social Services receives a certain amount of money per refugee to provide all the necessary services to help them resettle, but that does not cover all the expenses. The agency receives additional financial and volunteer help from Lutheran and other congregations and private donors.

10 What direct payments do refugees receive?

Each refugee also receives a one-time federal grant of \$900 to pay for their initial housing and other expenses when they arrive. The ongoing cash assistance refugees receive is based on the size of the family, age of family members, and is provided for up to eight months. Refugees receive a loan for their travel expenses to the US which they are required to repay within three years of arrival.

11 What is the role of New American Services and Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota in the refugee resettlement process?

The agency helps refugees adjust to their new life in the community and gain self-sufficiency as quickly as possible. This includes finding and furnishing an apartment for them, meeting them at the airport, providing orientation classes on life in the United States, providing cash assistance for up to eight months after arrival, providing case management services to assist with needs that arise, providing employment services, coordinating volunteer services and more.

Lutheran Social Services also coordinates with other agencies that provide additional services, including mandatory English language classes, medical services, food stamps and other services that refugees are eligible for as is any other legal resident.

Some of the main services provided to refugees by New American Services include:

Reception and Placement Services

Pre-arrival: Securing and furnishing apartment; airport welcome.

First 7 days: English testing and mandatory class registration; Social Security card application; referrals to County Services, schools, financial assistance, employment services, health care as needed

First 30 days: Case management core services

Employment Services

First 7 days up to 5 years: Working with local employers, assist refugees in finding employment as soon as possible

Wilson-Fish Services

First 7 days: Refugee Cash Assistance enrollment; assessment and plan; program agreement

First 30 days: Cash assistance (for up to 8 months); initial and extended orientation classes (up to 3 years); Case management services (up to 5 years)

Targeted Assistance for refugees with prolonged difficulty obtaining self-sufficiency

1-5 years after arrival: Case management and assisted job search

Homebuyer Education

1+ years: Individual assistance and group classes

Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program

Pre-arrival until age 18 or 21: Foster care family licensing, placement, case management, independent living services and ongoing services to adulthood.

Immigration Services provided for a fee

30 days to 5+ years: Affidavit of Relationship and Refugee Interest forms for qualified family members

2-5 years: Green Card application

5+ years: Citizenship services

12 What assistance do you receive from volunteers in the resettlement process?

Church groups and individuals have been very generous in donating their time and talents to help resettle refugees in North Dakota.

Volunteers from various Lutheran and other churches in Fargo, Grand Forks and Bismarck, where refugees are currently resettled, have organized groups of 4-10 members who regularly visit refugee families in their homes, take them out and about in the community and help ease their transition to life in North Dakota. The parish nurse programs in many Protestant and Catholic congregations provide important health services to refugees. Volunteers also serve as English tutors, donate household goods and clothing, host events, make quilts and provide transportation.

St. John's Lutheran Church, Jamestown, regularly supplies beautiful quilts to warm refugee families on cold winter nights. Hope Lutheran Church, Fargo, collects donated furniture for refugee apartments. St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, organizes a Thanksgiving dinner for refugees.

Salem Evangelical Free Church and Olivet Lutheran Church, Fargo, participate in Project Boaz – collecting, refurbishing and donating many bicycles to refugees each year. Olivet Lutheran Church also coordinates a garden project with refugees.

One volunteer couple in Bismarck held a New Year's Eve party last year for refugee families that was so successful, they plan to make it an annual event.

13 Why do refugees come to North Dakota specifically?

Once legally admitted to the United States, refugees have the right to live wherever they want to. Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota has built an infrastructure of services and resettles refugees in Fargo / West Fargo, Grand Forks and Bismarck. However, refugees have the right to refuse our services and settle somewhere else. At the same time, refugees who were resettled in other states have the right to move to North Dakota just as any other legal resident of the US.

14 Why do refugees from warm climates choose North Dakota?

Refugees resettle in North Dakota to be near their families and to find jobs, good schools and safe neighborhoods – similar to the reasons that most of us live where we do.

15 What refugee populations are currently being resettled in North Dakota?

Our largest resettlement groups are currently Bhutanese and Iraqis and we also are serving refugees from Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, DR Congo and Liberia.

16 Where are refugees being resettled in North Dakota?

Lutheran Social Services is currently authorized by the US State Department to resettle refugees in Fargo, Grand Forks and Bismarck and has no plans to request authorization to resettle refugees in additional cities. However, refugees have the right to live where they choose and may at some point choose to move away from Fargo, Grand Forks and Bismarck to other cities in North Dakota or anywhere in the USA. Refugees originally resettled in other parts of the country may also move to communities in North Dakota.

Since not all refugees currently residing in North Dakota were resettled by Lutheran Social Services, we do not know what the current refugee populations are in specific communities. However, in Fargo and West Fargo, Lutheran Social Services has resettled approximately 4,000 refugees from 35 countries during the past 14 years. Each year for the past two years, Lutheran Social Services has resettled about 300 refugees in the Fargo / West Fargo area, 80 in Grand Forks and 30 in Bismarck.

17 How do refugees support themselves?

The New American Services program of Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota helps refugees find jobs to support themselves because they are eligible for living stipends and resettlement services for only a short time after they arrive. Cash assistance is provided for up to eight months. Employment and case management services are available for up to five years after arrival.

Helping refugees find jobs has become more difficult since the recent downturn in the economy, but we are still able to find jobs for the great majority of employment-eligible refugees.

Last year 171 newly arrived refugees on our caseload were employed, representing 60% of the employment-eligible adults. Their average starting wage was \$8.91 per hour. About 90% of employed new Americans stay at their job for more than three months, a good indication they will keep that job.

The refugees resettled in North Dakota are, on average, able to acquire sufficient English skills and job skills to become economically self-sufficient within 6-18 months after arrival.

Refugees have been helpful to our economy because they have taken jobs in industries such as hospitality and light manufacturing that had employee shortages and required few English or technical skills.

18 Can refugees apply for public assistance?

Refugees are eligible for and subject to the same criteria for public assistance program as are all other legal residents.

19 How do we know that criminals and terrorists are not coming here as refugees?

The US Department of Homeland Security conducts several background checks on every refugee prior to their being admitted to the US. FBI and CIA background checks are also conducted. In addition, Security Advisory Opinions (SAO) and CLASS name checks (Consular Lookout and Support System) are conducted by the US embassies.

20 How much crime is committed by refugees?

North Dakota law enforcement agencies and courts do not track offenses by ethnicity or country of origin.

It can be noted that despite the arrival of refugees to North Dakota since 1946, the state is ranked as having the lowest crime rate in the nation. In addition, research shows that the incarceration rate for native-born men in the US age 18-39 has been five times higher than the rate for all immigrant men, including refugees and immigrants. (American Immigration Law Foundation, Immigration Policy Center, Spring 2007)

21 Do refugees pay taxes?

Refugees pay taxes from the day they arrive here. All federal and state income taxes apply to refugees as well as local and state sales taxes. Once established, new Americans buy houses and pay property taxes as soon as they can. There are currently at least 75 new American families in North Dakota who own their own homes, representing about \$150,000 per year in property tax receipts.

22 Is it true that Lutheran Social Services is building apartments to house refugees in various North Dakota communities?

New American Services' refugee resettlement and Lutheran Social Services Housing are two different programs at Lutheran Social Services of ND.

After a family has been resettled by New American Services to a State Department-approved location (Fargo, Grand Forks or Bismarck), they are free to move to any community they wish in the United States, perhaps to be nearer to relatives or for a change in climate. Each family makes their own decision on where to live in the long term. Once re-settled, refugees are not "moved" by Lutheran Social Services.

At Lutheran Social Services Housing, the goal is to build attractive, quality housing units that are well-managed—ensuring that they are community assets into the future. Lutheran Social Services Housing follows Fair Housing law, which means that every prospective tenant is treated equally – from the first phone call, to the review of the application, to the move-in. These rental units are open to any individual or family who wants to rent housing in a community and who passes the normal screening process that includes criminal and credit background checks, verification of income and references. Some properties are available only to tenants of a certain age, namely senior citizens, which is the only preference in place in any of the housing projects.