



HISTORY OF U.S. REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

On June 20, government, civil society, and international organizations, honor refugees around the world who have been forced to flee their homes due to persecution, conflict, and war.

Since its foundation, the United States has offered freedom and opportunity to refugees fleeing the world's most dangerous and desperate situations. The U.S. refugee resettlement program reflects the core values of the United States and our strong tradition of providing a safe haven for the oppressed.

Refugees have been coming to our shores since the pilgrims fled religious persecution. The U.S. Congress enacted the first refugee legislation in 1948 following the admission of more than 250,000 displaced Europeans from World War II. This legislation provided for the admission of an additional 400,000 displaced Europeans in the coming years. Later laws provided for admission of persons fleeing Communism, largely from China, Hungary, Korea, Poland and Yugoslavia, and in the 1960s, Cubans fleeing Fidel Castro's regime. Most of these waves of refugees were assisted by American ethnic- and religious-based not-for-profit organizations, which formed the base for today's vibrant public-private partnership in U.S. refugee resettlement efforts.

With the fall of Saigon in April of 1975, the U.S. faced the challenge of resettling hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese refugees. As a result, Congress passed The Refugee Act of 1980, which standardized federally-supported resettlement services for all refugees admitted to the United States. This Act incorporates the definition of "refugee" used in the U.N. Refugee Convention and provides for regular and emergency admission of refugees of all nationalities. The Refugee Act provided the legal basis for the establishment of The Office of Refugee Resettlement at the Department of Health and Human Services.

Since 1975, the U.S. has resettled more than three million refugees. Most come from Vietnam or the former Soviet Union, although more than 70 nationalities are represented. Since the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980, annual admissions figures have ranged from a high of 207,116 in 1980, to a low of 27,100 the year following September 11, 2001. Seventy thousand refugees were admitted in both 2013 and 2014.

Refugees show tremendous resilience, and their backgrounds are diverse. Some were doctors, scientists, or journalists; others have never used electricity. They seize the chance for a new beginning. They work hard in industries needing labor. They pay taxes, attend school, serve in the military, and assist newer arrivals, making our communities more vibrant and diverse in the process. After five years, refugees can apply to become American citizens. A number of prominent American citizens were refugees, including Albert Einstein and former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and Madeleine Albright.

"The ordeals refugees survive and the aspirations they hold resonate with us as Americans. This country was built by people who fled oppression and war, leapt at opportunity, and worked day and night to remake themselves in this new land."

-President Barack Obama

