

Refugee Fact Sheet*

- A refugee has legal status in the United States and is legally allowed to work and go through the process to apply for U.S. citizenship. A refugee “is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries.”¹
- 50% of the world’s refugees are children ²
- Refugees make up approximately 10% of the 1 million immigrants granted lawful permanent residence in the U.S. each year.³
- There is very strict screening of refugees admitted to the U.S., including thorough background checks.^{4,5} This process often takes two years.
- In the recent past, the U.S. has welcomed 50,000-70,000 refugees/year⁶ However, refugee resettlement has decreased significantly in the U.S. In 2018 fiscal year, 22,491 refugees were settled compared to 84,994 in 2017—a 71% decrease.⁷
- Per capita, Lebanon and Jordan received the most refugees in 2015.⁸ The U.S. ranked 14th, per capita.⁹
- Refugees have to start paying back their plane ticket six months after arrival.¹⁰
- Refugees are more likely to start businesses than U.S. born citizens¹¹
- Refugees living in cities with population decline, such as Akron and Cleveland, OH, have been found to have the most positive economic impact on their community.^{3,6}

***Developed by World Relief**

¹ <http://www.unrefugees.org/what-is-a-refugee/>

² <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/07/world/unicef-report-on-child-refugees-and-migrants/>

³ [Pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org)

⁴ <https://www.uscis.gov/refugeescreening>

⁵ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/11/20/infographic-screening-process-refugee-entry-united-states>

⁶ <http://worldreliefakron.org/refugee-resettlement>

⁷ <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/us-refugee-resettlement-remains-record-lows-halfway-fy-2019>

⁸ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2015/06/18/the-countries-with-the-most-refugees-per-1000-inhabitants-infographic/#316202142c0a>

⁹ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/09/24/how-the-u-s-compares-with-other-countries-taking-in-refugees/>

¹⁰ <http://www.uscrippayments.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/09/10/the-big-myth-about-refugees/>

BASIC U.S. IMMIGRATION TERMS AND STATUSES

GENERAL TERMS

Immigrant: Any alien in the United States who has been admitted with a long-term status.

Non-immigrant: An alien who seeks *temporary* entry to the United States for a specific purpose. Examples: Visitor, Student, Fiancé. Typically they do not qualify for public benefits.

Alien: General term used by U.S. Immigration for any person who is not a citizen or national of the U.S. “Foreign national” is a synonym and used outside of statutes when referring to noncitizens of the U.S.

Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) (Green Card Holder): A person who is not a citizen of the United States who is living in the U.S. under legally recognized and lawfully recorded permanent residence as an immigrant. Also known as “Permanent Resident” and “Green Card holder.” Eligibility for benefits depends on the status under which they entered the U.S.

Visa: Refers to many different statuses. Visa is the general thing that allows you to enter the country legally. Some visas allow people to get green cards immediately, like family, special immigrant, and diversity visas. Other types of visas do not have a pathway to get a green card, like a student or visitor visa.

Work Permit: A work permit itself is not a status. Legal Permanent Residents (LPRS) are eligible for work permits. Some long-term statuses are eligible for a work permit before getting a green card, such as refugees. Some short-term statuses are eligible for a work permit, like DACA and TPS.

Naturalization: Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs) may become citizens through naturalization. Typically, they must be in the U.S. for 5 or more years to qualify for naturalization, although immigrants who marry citizens can qualify in 3 years. Naturalized citizens are eligible for public benefits on the same terms as other citizens.

LONG TERM STATUS (STATUSES THAT ARE ELIGIBLE FOR GREEN CARDS)

Refugee: A person who fits within the United Nations definition of refugee and has undergone all of the rigorous background checks and interviews *outside* of the U.S. before being admitted into the country. Refugees are defined as those who have been forced to flee their country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Refugees are eligible to adjust to LPR status after one year of continuous presence in the U.S. Refugees are eligible for most public benefits.

Asylee: A person who fits the definition of refugee but is claiming the status *after* entering the U.S. in a different non-immigrant status. One must apply for asylum within one-year of arriving in the U.S. The processing for this includes interviews, appearances in court, and the same background checks as refugees. Asylees are eligible to adjust to LPR status after one year of continuous presence in the U.S. During the application process, asylees are eventually eligible for a work-permit, but are not eligible for public benefits. Once asylum status is granted, public benefits are accessible like refugees.

Family Visa: A program for LPR and U.S. citizens to bring immediate family to the U.S. LPRs can only bring spouses and children. U.S. citizens can bring spouses, children, parents, and siblings. These individuals come to the U.S. after a long waiting period, consular processing, and interviews and are immediately able to get a green card. There are very few public benefits available for this type of status.

Diversity visa: A program that provides visas to immigrants from countries with historically low rates of immigration to the U.S. The process includes education requirements, background checks, applications and interviews before being awarded this status. Recipients of the Diversity Visa get a green card shortly after arriving in the U.S. and are eligible for public benefits after 5 years.

U-Visa: Legal status in the form of a U-Visa may be granted to victims of domestic assault or other violent crimes such as sexual assault, armed robbery, kidnapping, etc. To qualify for a U-Visa, an applicant must show that they have cooperated with the authorities in the criminal investigation or prosecution, and that they have suffered substantial physical or mental harm as a result of the crime. U-Visa holders can adjust their status to Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) status after 3 years.

T-Visa: Legal status and protection in the form of a T-Visa may be granted to those who are or have been victims of human trafficking under the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (VTVPA). To qualify for a T-Visa, an applicant must show that they are/were a victim of trafficking, are in the U.S. due to trafficking, have/will comply with reasonable requests from law enforcement in the investigation/prosecution of human trafficking, and would suffer extreme hardship if removed from the U.S. May apply for Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) status after 3 years.

VAWA (Violence Against Women Act): VAWA is a form of protection for immigrants who are victims of physical abuse or extreme cruelty by their U.S. citizen or LPR spouse, parent, son or daughter. VAWA allows abuse victims to apply for their own immigration status instead of having to rely on their abusive family member to file for them. While there is no requirement that the abuse be reported to the police, a police report or order for protection is very helpful evidence in a VAWA case. VAWA recipients are eligible to apply for LPR after 3 years.

NON-IMMIGRANT STATUS – STATUSES WITHOUT OPTIONS FOR GREEN CARDS

TPS (Temporary Protected Status): A temporary status designated by the Secretary of Homeland Security for nationals of another country that are currently in the U.S. Typically this status is given when the country of origin has temporary conditions that prevent nationals of that country from returning safely. This could be national disasters, armed conflict or outbreaks of illnesses. This status allows TPS holders to live and work legally in the U.S and is revoked with most criminal arrests. Most forms of public benefits are not available to TPS holders and the status does not currently provide a green card or more permanent status. TPS for each country has an expiration date. When the expiration date nears, it is determined if the status will be extended for 6-18 months or allowed to expire, meaning all TPS holders from that country have to leave before the expiration date.

DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals): A temporary status that was available to young who who arrived in the U.S as children without documentation and who meet residency requirements. This status provides DACA holders a way to legally live and work in the U.S., but does not provide any way to get to Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) status. Most forms of public benefits are not available.

Undocumented: Someone who entered the U.S. without receiving any legal entry documents or overstayed their non-immigrant visa status. In most states, people who are undocumented are not eligible for public benefits, but can apply for benefits for their children who have legal status.

** Other non-immigrant statuses include but are not limited to student, visitor, some work statuses, fiancé and some religious worker visas. All have very limited public benefits eligibility.