



Refugee resettlement programs work tirelessly to help Afghans coming into US

Dan Grossman

August 24, 2021

As Afghans flee their country in thousands, many are coming to the United States seeking freedom.

It can be an exhausting process as they endure plane rides and countless legal processes on their way to the U.S.

There are three main types of migrants coming into the United States right now: refugees, asylum seekers, and Afghan allies.

Each is a slight variation of one another, as refugees have typically begun the immigration process months, if not years in advance. Asylum seekers show up at a port of entry hoping for freedom, and allies have worked with the United States government in Afghanistan.

In each case, the application process is long and complex, as it includes paperwork, interviews, and medical exams--just to name a few.

“Seeing the humanity in people is critical,” said Jennifer Wilson, executive director of the Denver division of the International Rescue Committee, one of nine national organizations that connect refugees and asylum seekers to local resources. “You think of everything you need to know to live in a place, to build a life there. So, we are really invested in bringing forward a whole array of services and supports to make sure they can get their feet under them.”

Wilson helps migrants acclimate to their new way of life by connecting them to schools, charities, jobs, and whatever else they may need after arriving in their new home, which is usually found and furnished by her organization.

“I don’t think the average person really understands what it is that compels people to leave their home,” she said.

Between October 2020 and June 2021, Wilson says her local office of the IRC helped settle 65 migrants, a number it has matched in the two months since.

But ever before migrants reach her, they deal with people like Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, President and CEO of Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services.

Last week, Vignarajah was in Fort Lee outside of Washington D.C. helping welcome migrants who first arrived in the United States.

“There’s a palpable sense of relief [when they first arrive],” said Vignarajah. “It takes a village to raise a child? It takes a village to welcome not just one family, but hundreds. They go through some of the most extreme vetting of any immigrants who come into this country. Honestly, I think some of my friends wouldn’t pass muster when you think about it.”

According to a 2016 study by the libertarian CATO institute, of the more than three million refugees accepted into the U.S. over the last 40 years, 20 have committed a terrorist-type attack on U.S. soil, a testament to the rigorous nature of that process.

“These are people who make our economies stronger, our communities safer, the data has proven that time and time again,” said Vignarajah.

Once a migrant and their family are cleared for entry into the U.S., they are housed with family and friends or on a military base until their permanent location is determined by the U.S. Department of State and other organizations under its umbrella. Government data shows Texas, Washington, and Ohio took in the most refugees in 2018, 20% of all those admitted into the United States.

Each year, the number of migrants accepted into the U.S. changes. In 1980, when the United States first passed legislation to establish permanent procedures for vetting, admitting, and resettling refugees in the country, more than 200,000 were allowed to resettle in the U.S. each year.

In most years since, that number has declined to 30,000 in 2019 under the Trump Administration. President Biden has worked to expand that number, aiming to resettle as many as 125,000 refugees in the United States in 2022.

“For the average family, I would say we end up connecting and referring them to two or three dozen different resources,” said Wilson. “We know that when people not only make connections within their own community, what we call social bonding, but also experience social bridging by reaching others who don’t share their culture, religion, culture, nationality. That’s when they really start to feel like they’re at home again.”