



Frequently Asked Questions Immigrant & Refugee Response

Who is a **refugee**?

The word **refugee** may refer to a wide variety of displaced people. Technically, and especially when we consider refugee response ministries, a refugee is someone officially recognized under that classification by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), “a person with a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.”

Who is an **immigrant**?

An **immigrant** is someone who comes to live permanently in another country. Immigrants can include refugees, asylum-seekers, and other pathways to residency or citizenship.

Who is a **migrant**?

There is no internationally accepted legal definition of a **migrant**. Most organizations consider migrants to be persons staying outside their country of origin, who are neither asylum-seekers nor refugees. Some migrants leave their country to pursue employment or education, or to join family, for example. Others feel they must leave because of poverty, political unrest, gang violence, natural disasters, or other serious circumstances that exist there.

Who is an **asylum-seeker**?

An **asylee** or **asylum-seeker** is a person who has left their country for another, and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations, but who has not yet been legally recognized as a *refugee* and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. Seeking asylum is a human right; everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum. This is not always what happens in practice.

- Explore [*The Asylum Process Map*](#), a resource from Church World Service.

What is the process for refugees?

A displaced person who leaves their home country and is classified as a refugee by the UNHCR is then referred to the U.S. State Department. The State Department interviews them, working with one of nine volunteer agencies (like Church World Service) to resettle the refugee in the part of the country where they hope to settle.

- Explore *The Refugee's Journey to America*, a resource from Church World Service.

When the refugee arrives in that location, they receive services from the local resettlement office connected that partner volunteer agency (the nine mentioned earlier). In most situations, churches are relied upon for support as *community sponsors* for individuals or families who are refugees in their community.

What does being a **community sponsor** mean?

Sponsorship varies widely from place to place. In varying degrees, churches who engage as **community sponsors** help for at least 90 days with financial resources, transportation, community involvement (enrolling students in school, helping set up a bank account, etc.), and general acclimation to the area.

What if our church cannot sponsor?

Sometimes churches do not have ready access to resettlement agencies, are not close enough to sponsor a family, or may not have the resources or volunteer capacity to handle the entirety of sponsorship. Most agencies will offer alternative opportunities for volunteer support, and Week of Compassion can help connect congregations who have either financial resources or volunteer capacity but not both, creating partnerships to assist in resettling families.

Who do I talk with to learn more about what our church can do?

[Week of Compassion](#)

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