

ADVANCED INTEGRATION GUIDE

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER ARRIVAL

Relocation to the United States as a refugee marks the beginning of a structured integration process supported by federal programs, nonprofit resettlement agencies, and community organizations. While arrival represents safety and legal protection, it also begins a period of rapid adjustment during which refugees are expected to build independence, secure employment, and adapt to American social and economic systems.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) operates through partnerships between the U.S. Department of State, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), and voluntary resettlement agencies. These organizations provide early services designed to stabilize families while preparing them to become economically self-sufficient.¹

Support provided after arrival is time-limited and goal-driven. Federal policy emphasizes rapid integration through employment and participation in community life rather than long-term dependency on assistance programs.²

3.1 Arrival and Reception Services

Upon arrival at a U.S. airport, refugees are received by a representative of a local resettlement agency. These agencies, sometimes called “VOLAGs” (voluntary agencies), operate under cooperative agreements with the U.S. government to provide initial support and orientation.³

Reception and Placement (R&P) services typically cover the first 30 to 90 days after arrival. During this time, agencies help refugees meet immediate needs such as transportation, housing setup, and enrollment in services.⁴

Airport reception often includes:

- Transportation to initial housing
- Distribution of basic supplies
- Orientation to neighborhood safety
- Introduction to case managers and interpreters

This structured welcome period is intended to reduce early stress and ensure that refugees have access to essential resources immediately after arrival.



3.2 Initial Housing and Household Stabilization

Securing safe housing is one of the most important priorities during the first weeks in the United States. Resettlement agencies typically arrange furnished apartments or shared housing before refugees arrive.

Housing support may include:

- Lease signing assistance
- Basic furniture and bedding
- Initial groceries
- Clothing suitable for local climate
- Orientation on paying rent and utilities

R&P funds provide limited financial support during this initial period, often covering rent and essential household needs for the first months.⁵ However, this assistance is not designed to be permanent. Refugees are expected to transition to independent housing as they begin earning income.

Housing arrangements may be modest compared to expectations. Many refugees share apartments or live in smaller units during the early stages of resettlement. Agencies emphasize that this is a temporary step toward stability rather than a final living situation.

3.3 Documentation and Administrative Setup

One of the first responsibilities after arrival is completing essential administrative tasks. Resettlement agencies assist refugees in navigating government systems, including applying for a Social Security number and enrolling in available benefits.

Typical administrative steps include:

- Applying for a Social Security card
- Completing employment eligibility documentation
- Scheduling medical screenings
- Opening bank accounts
- Enrolling in public benefits where eligible

A Social Security number is essential for employment, taxes, and financial systems. Agencies help refugees understand how to protect personal information and avoid identity theft – an important part of adapting to the U.S. financial system.

3.4 School Enrollment and Education Support

Families with children receive assistance enrolling in local public schools. Education is a key component of long-term integration, helping young refugees develop language skills, social connections, and academic opportunities.

Resettlement agencies help parents:

- Register children for school
- Provide vaccination records
- Access English language learning programs
- Understand school schedules and transportation



Specialized newcomer education programs often provide additional support for refugee students, helping them adjust linguistically and socially to their new environment.⁶

Schools may also offer counseling services to address trauma or culture shock experienced during displacement.

3.5 Healthcare Access and Medical Screening

Healthcare access begins shortly after arrival. Refugees are encouraged to complete a domestic medical screening to identify health needs and ensure continuity of care.

Medical screenings typically include:

- Infectious disease testing
- Vaccination updates
- Referrals to healthcare providers

The Office of Refugee Resettlement provides limited medical assistance programs to help refugees access care during their first months in the United States.² Early health screenings are important not only for individual well-being but also for protecting public health and preventing barriers to employment and education.⁷

3.6 Employment Services and Economic Integration

Employment is the central focus of refugee resettlement in the United States. Federal policy emphasizes rapid workforce participation as the primary pathway to independence.

Resettlement agencies provide employment services such as:

- Job readiness training
- Resume preparation
- Interview coaching
- English language classes
- Vocational training
- Job placement assistance

Many refugees begin working within the first few months after arrival. Entry-level jobs may be necessary initially, even for individuals with professional backgrounds. This approach helps refugees gain U.S. work experience, improve language skills, and build financial stability.

ORR programs emphasize economic self-sufficiency and provide employment assistance and case management services designed to help refugees secure stable income as quickly as possible.¹



3.7 Cultural Orientation and Community Integration

Cultural orientation is an essential part of post-arrival support. These programs help refugees understand:

- U.S. laws and civic responsibilities
- Workplace expectations
- Financial literacy
- Transportation systems
- Tenant rights and responsibilities
- Public safety and emergency services

Orientation sessions may be delivered through workshops, community classes, or one-on-one case management. The goal is to reduce confusion, prevent legal misunderstandings, and encourage participation in local communities.

Resettlement agencies also help refugees connect with:

- Faith communities
- Language programs
- Community centers
- Volunteer organizations

Strong social networks are associated with better employment outcomes and improved mental health during resettlement.

3.8 Time-Limited Financial Assistance

Financial assistance provided through refugee programs is intentionally temporary. ORR programs may provide Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) or Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) for eligible individuals who do not qualify for other benefits.⁸

These programs are designed to:

- Cover basic needs during the transition period
- Support participation in employment programs
- Encourage rapid movement toward self-sufficiency

Refugees are expected to begin working and supporting themselves within months. Government assistance should be viewed as a short-term support mechanism rather than a long-term income source.

3.9 Trauma-Informed Support and Mental Health Services

Many refugees arrive after experiencing trauma, displacement, or loss. ORR programs emphasize trauma-informed care, recognizing the emotional and psychological challenges associated with resettlement.²



Support may include:

- Counseling referrals
- Peer support groups
- Community mentorship programs
- Family integration services

Addressing mental health needs early can improve employment outcomes, school performance, and overall well-being.

3.10 Long-Term Integration Goals

While the first months after arrival are focused on stabilization, long-term integration involves building independence and contributing to society.

Key goals include:

- Securing stable employment
- Learning English
- Maintaining lawful immigration status
- Pursuing education or professional development
- Building credit and financial independence
- Preparing for permanent residency and eventual citizenship

The U.S. resettlement system is designed to help refugees transition from initial support to full participation in American society.

Important Reminder

Financial assistance is short-term. Economic independence is expected within months.

Resettlement agencies provide guidance, but success depends on active participation by refugees themselves. Individuals who engage fully with employment programs, language training, and cultural orientation typically achieve stronger integration outcomes.

Footnotes

1. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) – Refugee Resettlement Program Overview
2. Office of Refugee Resettlement Mission and Services
3. Voluntary Agencies (VOLAGs) Overview
4. Reception and Placement Program Overview
5. U.S. Department of State – Reception and Placement Program
6. Newcomer Education Programs Overview
7. Refugee Health Screening Information
8. Refugee Cash Assistance and Medical Assistance Overview

