



Welcome the stranger.  
Protect the refugee.



## **Refugee Resettlement in Partnership**

A Guide for Community  
Volunteers and Institutions

September, 2020

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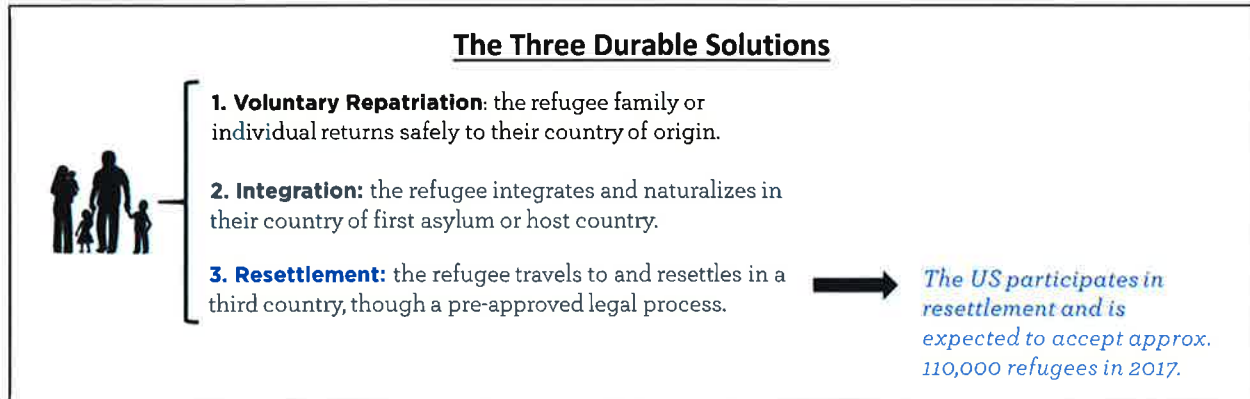
## **Context and Overview**

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## About Refugees and Resettlement

**Definition:** A refugee is someone who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (1951 Refugee Convention). The persecution a refugee experiences may include harassment, threats, abduction or torture. A refugee is afforded legal protection either by their host country's government, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or both. For further information on the distinction between refugee, asylee, and other immigrant classifications, see the [Roads to Refuge](#) informational video.

Worldwide, the number of refugees is the highest in recorded history, at a staggering 21.3 million people, and about half of the world's refugees are children. Around one in every 122 people today is either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum ([UNHCR](#)). After fleeing their home country, refugees seek safety in a different country, and may live in an established refugee camp or in a pre-existing city or community. Although the Syrian refugee crisis is receiving particular attention, there are also large refugee populations from Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burma, the Central African Republic (CAR), Iraq, and Eritrea, among others. You can read more about refugee statistics here: [UNHCR](#) and see an interactive map of refugee populations over the years here: [The Refugee Project](#).



**The Three Durable Solutions:** The 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees lists three durable solutions. The diagram above lists them: 1. *Voluntary repatriation*, 2. *Integration in the first country of asylum*, and 3. *Resettlement in a third country*. (1) If the situation in a refugee's home country changes and the source of persecution no longer exists, many refugees ultimately want to return to their communities, families, homes and schools, but in many cases, voluntary repatriation is impossible due to protracted crises. (2) The second option for the refugee is to integrate into the country to which he fled, or country of first asylum. For example, if a refugee fled Syria and traveled to Lebanon, Lebanon would be his country of first asylum. This is possible if he is able and permitted to integrate into Lebanon. There may be similarities in culture, language, social structure, and custom. However, given that Lebanon is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Optional Protocol, and about 25% of Lebanon's population is now comprised of Syrian refugees, this option is not possible for most

refugees due to legal obstacles and Lebanon's lack of economic, social, and political capacity to integrate a large influx of refugees. (3) The last option is resettlement, which unlike the first two options, includes relocating to a new country with oftentimes very different norms, culture, and language.

The number of refugees who are considered for resettlement to a new country is incredibly small compared to the scale of the crisis, as depicted in the chart below. The international community, including the United States, has committed to resettle less than 1% of the refugees of concern to the UNHCR. The UNHCR, country governments and NGO partners therefore identify vulnerable refugees most in need of resettlement. Each year the President, in consultation with Congress, determines the numerical ceiling for refugee admissions. For Fiscal Year 2020, the United States is expected to resettle 18,000 refugees. In FY 2019, refugees admitted to the US were from Africa (54%), Asia (17%), Europe (17%), the Near East & South Asia (9%), and Latin America and the Caribbean (3%).

*\*Source: UNHCR*



While the United States has welcomed refugees throughout its history, the current US Refugee Admissions Program was established by Congress in 1980 as a public-private partnership between the government and national and local organizations. Refugees may only apply for resettlement if referred by the UNHCR, a qualified NGO, a US Embassy, or if they fit within a family reunification or humanitarian category established by the US Department of State. Criteria for resettlement in the US include:

- Priority 1: Refugees referred from UNHCR, US Embassy, or a qualified NGO, by virtue of their circumstances and apparent need for resettlement.
- Priority 2: Groups of refugees designated of special humanitarian concern to the US.
- Priority 3: Family reunification cases (spouses, unmarried children under 21, and parents of persons lawfully admitted to the United States as refugees or asylees or permanent residents or US citizens who previously had refugee or asylum status).

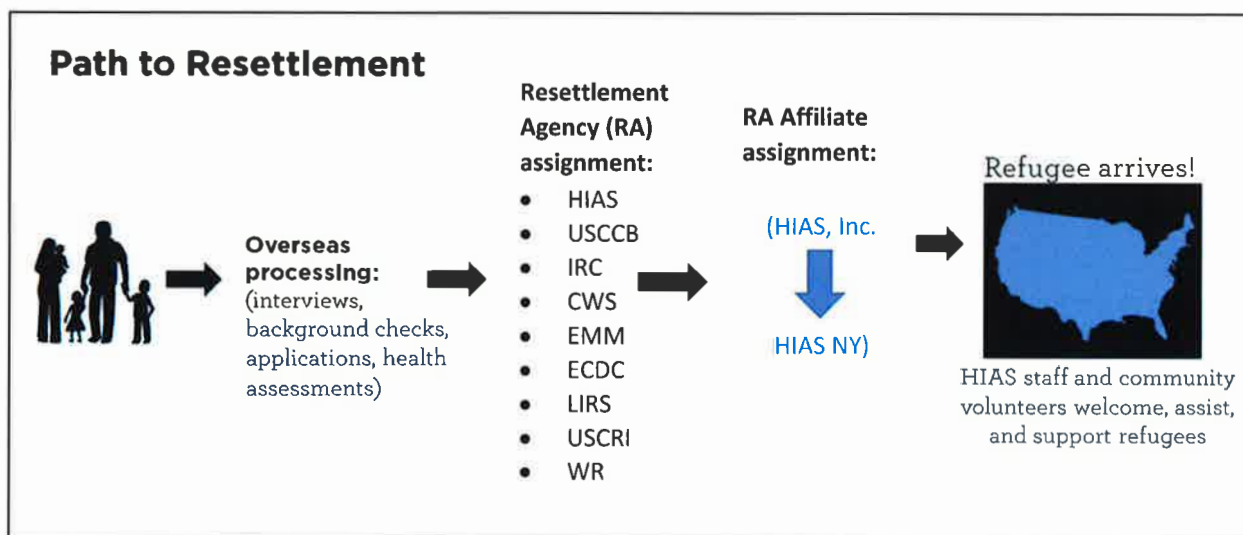
The path to resettlement is tedious, lengthy, and stringent. Although highly simplified, a diagram on the next page provides an overview of the resettlement process. The family or individual goes through an intensive process of applications, interviews, biometric screenings, background checks, and health



examinations by multiple agencies, including UNHCR, US Resettlement Support Centers, US Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the Department of Homeland Security before they are considered for refugee resettlement. You can read more about the process here: [WhiteHouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov).

If a refugee family clears these extensive processes, they are matched to one of the national resettlement agencies, such as HIAS. There are nine resettlement agencies (formerly known as Voluntary Agencies, or VOLAGs) authorized by the U.S. government to resettle refugees. They are:

- Church World Service (CWS)
- Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC)
- Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM)
- HIAS, Inc.
- International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS)
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)
- World Relief (WR)



Every week the nine resettlement agencies (RAs) meet to distribute refugee cases. RAs are responsible for pre-arrival processing, reception, and integration services for the refugee cases allocated to them. Refugee cases are placed based on several considerations including case size and availability of affordable housing, expertise resettling populations with special needs, local ethnic and religious communities, and language capacity of the local resettlement agency. Individuals who arrive in the United States as a refugee benefit from this unique immigration status and arrive on a path to citizenship. Once the case is assured, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) arranges their travel. Upon their arrival, representatives from a local HIAS affiliate, such as HIAS NY, greet refugees at the airport and provide for their basic needs during the initial resettlement period (30-90 days) with funding from the State Department.

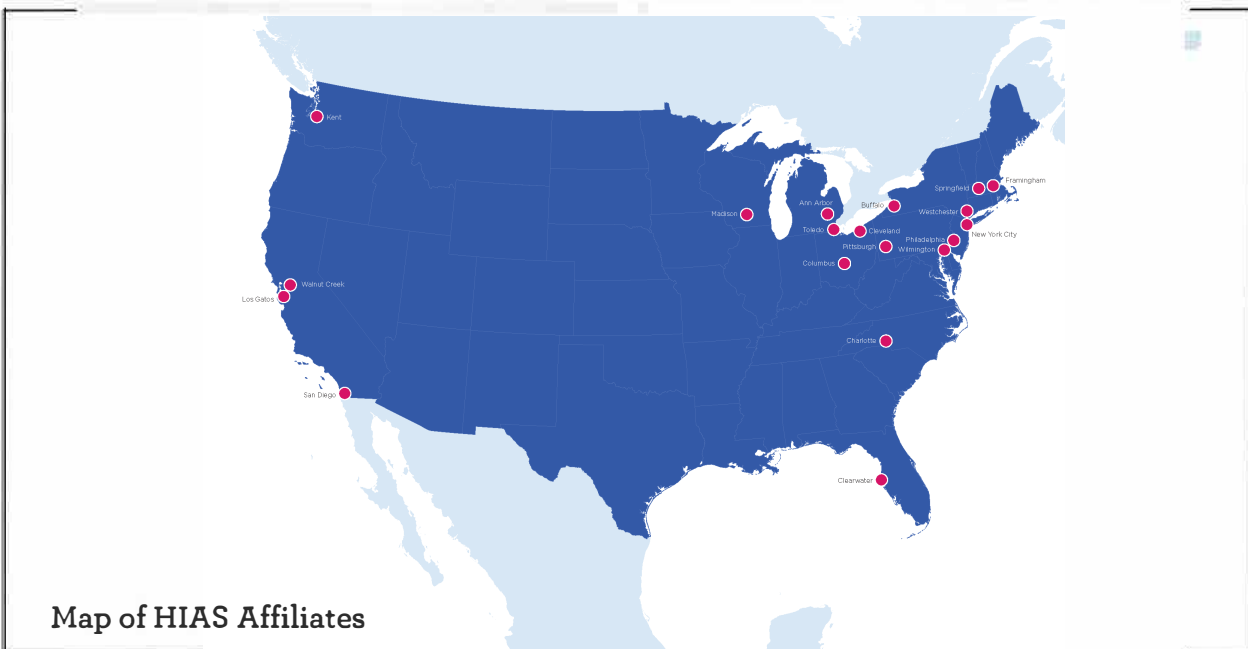
## HIAS in the United States

Guided by our Jewish values and history, HIAS protects those whose lives are in danger for being who they are. During our 135-year history, we've helped more than 4.5 million refugees. Today, violence and persecution have forced more than 65 million people around the world to flee their homes, the highest number of displaced persons since WWII. HIAS, formerly known as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, works both globally to provide legal protection, psychosocial services, and livelihoods assistance and locally in the United States as one of nine refugee resettlement agencies (RAs). In the U.S., HIAS resettles refugees through its local affiliates, including HIAS NY, which receive and provide direct services to the refugees upon arrival.

**Vision** HIAS stands for a world in which refugees find welcome, safety, and freedom.

**Mission** HIAS rescues people whose lives are in danger for being who they are.  
We protect the most vulnerable refugees, helping them build new lives and reunite them with their families in safety and freedom.  
We advocate for the protection of refugees and assure that displaced people are treated with the dignity they deserve.

HIAS used to resettle refugees because they were Jewish and needed assistance. Today, HIAS resettles refugees from all different backgrounds and identities because it aligns with the values and history of the Jewish community. Coming from a place of compassion and understanding for those who are escaping persecution, HIAS operates in the hope that others might find a better life and new beginning. We continue to provide all refugees with what each of us wants for ourselves—the ability to control our lives, to educate the next generation, to raise our families without fear—and to advocate for America's historic and honored status as a welcoming, humanitarian nation.



## Description of Volunteer Framework

Empowered with information and resources, the Westchester community can collaborate with HIAS NY and walk together with refugees as they begin their new lives in the United States. This volunteer framework aims to engage volunteers in refugee partnership, leading to communities that are healthier, safer, more economically sound and culturally rich for all residents. HIAS NY believes that communities can channel their support along five Pathways to refugee integration: Housing, Health, Education, Employment and Community Connections. While these Pathways certainly overlap and correlate, all five are crucial in providing comprehensive community welcome to recently arrived refugees as they begin their lives as New Americans.

Even with robust volunteer support, HIAS NY staff remain the point-people for a refugee household and are responsible for completing (or ensuring the completion of) all services as required by the US Department of State. Community volunteers will be in regular communication with HIAS NY staff and will serve as an essential part of the refugee resettlement team. HIAS NY will help organize interested volunteers, facilitate and host trainings, and provide ongoing support. Host organizations will recruit and manage volunteers internally.

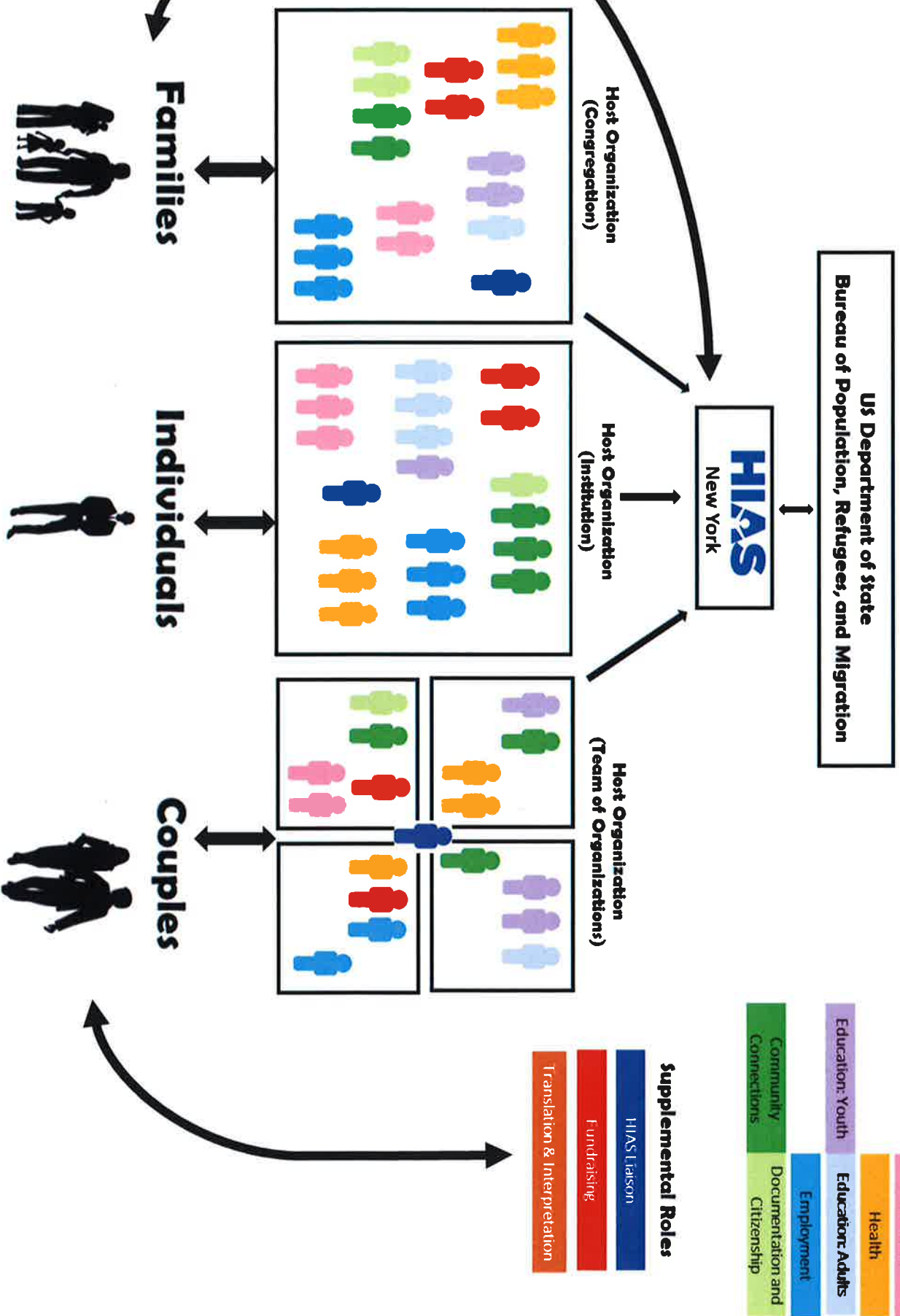
HIAS NY staff will create meaningful ways for volunteers to collaborate and coordinate, including but not limited to:

*Committee Meetings:* Committees will meet regularly as needed. Committee meetings will continue for as long as necessary, and then meet as needed on an ongoing basis.

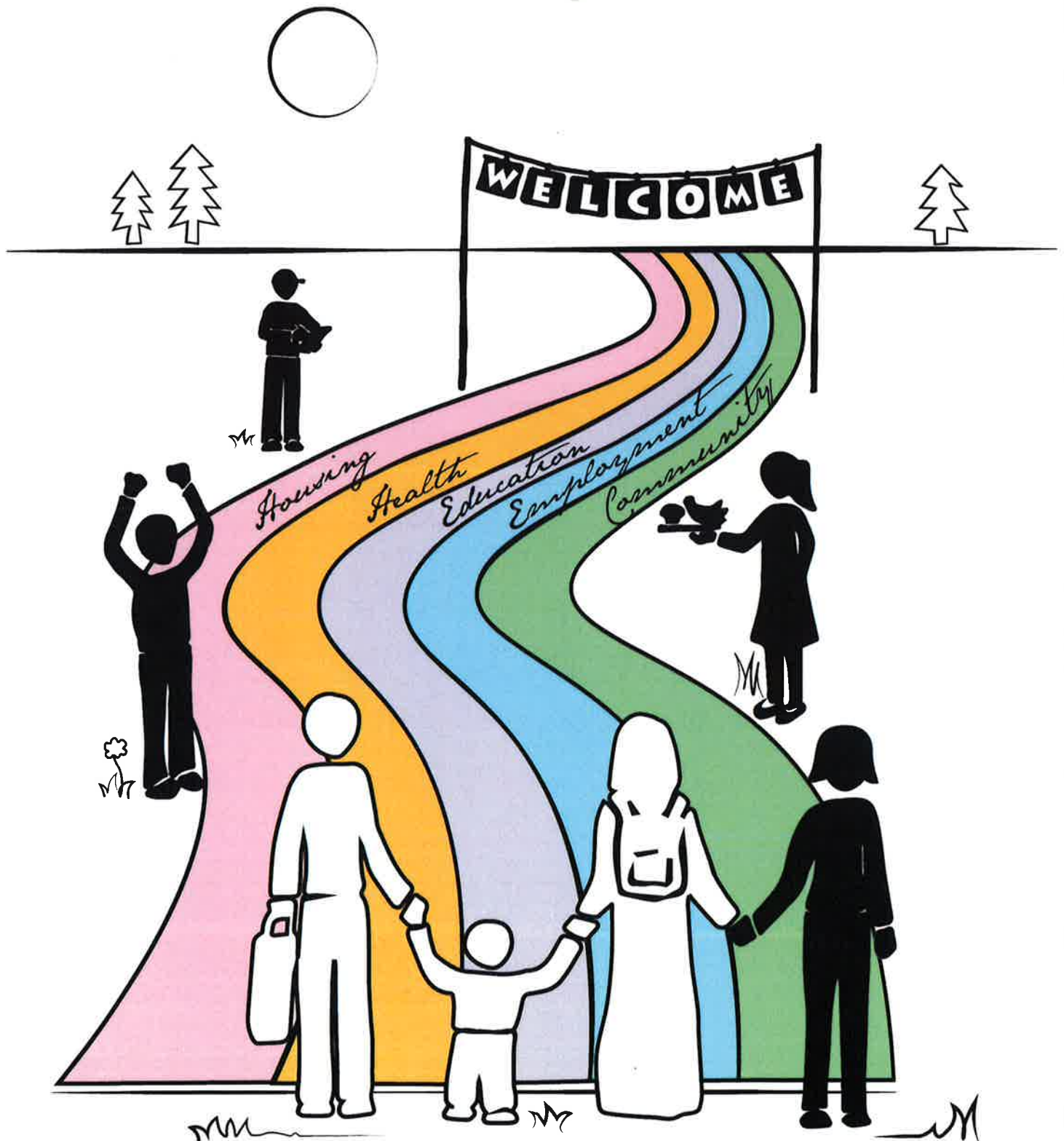
*Monthly Cross-Institution Collaborative Meetings:* All volunteers who work within a Pathway will meet monthly to share best practices, concerns, and successes. For example, all Employment volunteers in a city or county would connect monthly. These collaboratives are intended to support volunteers in their parallel roles and create a supportive, cooperative environment. Case managers will use this opportunity to disseminate any new trends or materials and troubleshoot issues or problem-solve. Collaboratives would also conduct advocacy work for their particular issue in the community, as needed.



# Roles and Committees within Host Organizations



# Welcoming Newly Arrived Refugees



**HIAS**

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Protect the refugee.

## **Housing Pathway: Volunteer Guide**

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## **Best Practices for all Volunteers**

### **1. Encourage Self-Sufficiency**

In any service, interaction, or appointment, always encourage self-sufficiency. It might feel helpful or be faster to do tasks *for* the refugee, but it is always better to do things *with* the refugee. Your efforts should educate and empower the refugee, not create dependency. It is alright and encouraged to draw healthy boundaries. She should learn how to do things independently so she can take control of her life, because volunteers will not be able to provide support indefinitely. Help establish a lifestyle for the refugee that can be maintained without your assistance after your volunteer service ends.

### **2. Understand Strengths**

Even though the refugee may have gone through many hardships, they are still the best person to make decisions that affect their lives. Be careful not to interpret a lack of English skill as a lack of experience or capability; these two characteristics are unrelated. Always try to think about refugees through a strength-based lens, instead of focusing on roadblocks or challenges. Create tangible goals with the refugee that tap into their strengths, and work towards their short-term goals and long-term dreams.

### **3. Ensure Comprehension**

As you interact with the refugees or witness other service providers interacting with refugees, pause and check for comprehension. Did they understand my question? Is the doctor using the right interpreter? Are they able to read this school registration packet? Did the insurance agent speak too quickly? Whenever possible and necessary, utilize trained interpreters who speak a language that the refugee is comfortable with. In certain situations, an interpreter is legally required to assist with interactions, such as medical settings, legal environments (with police) and with government-funded organizations (public schools). Comprehension can be verified by asking the refugee what they've understood from the conversation, offering an interpreter to assist, or asking follow-up questions.

### **4. Be Aware: Trauma-Informed Care**

Refugees come from a range of backgrounds and experiences. Not all refugees have experienced violent trauma as a product of war or violence, but all refugees have experienced some degree of trauma due to their displacement as refugees. It's important to be aware and sensitive to this, without being overly reactionary or presumptuous. Stress and anxiety due to trauma can manifest itself in many different ways. Perhaps the refugee is reluctant to trust you, after years of living in a volatile environment where she always had to be on guard. Maybe he is reluctant to become independent and exhibits low confidence, after being marginalized for so long. And sometimes, trauma can lead to depression, thoughts of suicide, or abuse. If you are concerned about a particular individual, speak to staff at HIAS NY. Read an overview of trauma-informed care here: [SAMHSA](#) and about the "Bag of Rocks" Metaphor here: [Refugee Health TA](#).

### **5. Advocate for the Refugee When Appropriate**

As you support the refugees in their everyday lives, speak up when you think they need an extra person on their team. For example, if you go to the doctor's office for an appointment, and the Arabic interpreter that was promised over the phone is not present, politely approach someone about the issue. They cannot start the appointment without an interpreter and the refugee has a right to timely, comprehensive care. If you think someone has treated the refugee unfairly, take note of the issue and



Speak with a staff member at HIAS NY about your concerns. It may be necessary to document the concern or make a complaint.

#### 6. Find Balance Between Cultural Environments

Refugees come from a variety of cultures, traditions, legal systems, family structures, and living conditions that may conflict with their new environment in the United States. Sometimes families need to make considerable modifications to their ways of life in new and unexpected ways. It is important to respect their culture and tradition, while still ensuring that they understand their new environment and the set of standards that they must adhere to: laws, leases, contracts, bill payments, child protections, and safety.

#### 7. Manage Expectations

Both you and the refugee will approach the next year of resettlement with a set of expectations. The refugee family has been trying to resettle in new country for years, and has come to view America as the answer to displacement. During this time, family members have heard about America from a variety of sources with varying degrees of reliability, and formed a set of hopes, expectations, and opinions about America before arriving. Likewise, you have also formed a set of opinions about refugees and the resettlement process, shaped by a similarly wide array of sources. Remember to meet the refugee where they are, and not expect a certain type of relationship with the family. Be patient with the family and approach your relationship with humility, openness, and understanding.

#### 8. Be Aware of Power Dynamics

Although the refugees should always be viewed as capable and independent, you are ultimately the guide and volunteer, and can accidentally fall into an unhealthy power dynamic with the refugee. Avoid situations where the refugee may feel compelled to do something outside of their comfort zone due to a need to please you or the other volunteers. For example, try not to put the refugee on the spot by asking her to speak about her country. Do not imply that he should attend certain social events if he is not genuinely interested. If the goal of the activity is to directly create further self-sufficiency and independence for the refugee, then it is important; if not, then approach the situation sensitively.

#### 9. Start Learning the Refugee's Language

As the refugees start to develop their English skills, you can also simultaneously start learning their language. There are many resources online that can teach how to say basic phrases in a variety of languages, from Swahili to Hakha Chin. Be sure to identify the dialect that the refugee speaks: for example, Arabic spoken in Syria is quite different from Arabic spoken in Morocco, and sometimes unintelligible. A few key phrases in a refugee's native language can go a long way in building trust and mutual respect.

#### *\*Recording your Volunteer Time and Donations*

*Throughout your time as a volunteer, it is important to keep records of everything you are donating, including hours, material goods, and driving mileage. HIAS NY may request this information, particularly for some programs (such as the Matching Grant employment program). You also may be able to receive personal tax deductions on some contributions.*

## 1. Housing Preparation and Welcome (2 Months Pre-arrival – 2 Weeks)

*HIAS NY is ultimately responsible for the provision of all Reception and Placement (R&P) Services. Members of the housing committee will undergo HIAS NY's housing training and will coordinate regularly with HIAS NY staff.*

For the housing pathway, you will need to start activities about 2 months before the refugee family arrives. This first section will include activities that occur pre-arrival, including how to: i) find suitable housing and ii) prepare the apartment for the refugee's arrival.

### 1i) Find Suitable Housing

The refugee will arrive and need **immediate** housing. HIAS NY staff and volunteers should arrange Refugee Apartment: The refugee will arrive, move into a pre-selected apartment, then sign the lease in the days following resettlement. *This is the most ideal situation.*

If unable to secure an apartment for the refugee or refugee family, HIAS NY and volunteers should arrange for a form of temporary or community housing until they can find an appropriate apartment. For community housing, the community may arrange housing for the refugee family for one or two nights (with a community member or in a hotel) and then move in and sign the lease in the days after arrival. For temporary housing, the refugee can be housed in temporary housing for the first month after arrival until she receives her Social Security documentation, then sign a lease and move into an apartment. This is the option of last resort. Please check with the case manager for more guidance.

**Reach Out to Landlords:** One of the most nuanced and challenging aspects of preparing for a refugee's arrival is reaching out to landlords to secure an apartment for a refugee household. Landlord outreach is particularly challenging because:

- The refugee household will not have established credit, an income, work history, or a social security number on arrival.
- The refugees will not receive a social security number for at least 2-3 weeks after arrival.
- The refugees are not present for a lease signing at the time when volunteers will want access to the apartment to prepare it with furniture and household items.

These difficulties compound with biases of any particular landlord, financial constraints, and the requirement to house refugees in safe areas and sanitary apartments (among other requirements). However, there is also a huge potential for alignment between landlords, volunteers, and refugees. Landlords seek tenants who will pay rent on time, respect neighbors, follow the law, and care for their apartment. Refugees, often after years of displacement, seek stability and a future in the United States and are often very committed to being a good neighbor and may reside in their location of resettlement for quite some time after arrival. Refugees also have more support and guidance than many other low-income populations or foreign-born populations in the United States; something that can be an asset for a landlord.

Networking and in-person outreach will likely yield potential landlords, as will looking on Craigslist, Zillow, or other online rental sources. Often landlords may rent to one refugee household and then depending on that experience, rent to other refugees. This Housing Pathway outlines many ways to ensure that the rental relationship is a successful one. This is very important, not only for the rental and credit history of the individual refugee household, but also for future refugee renters. While HIAS NY has some connections, or advice on locations to search for housing, much of the outreach is done individually and household by household, and may take concerted effort and perseverance.

**Search for an Apartment:** Prior to knowledge of the arrival of a refugee family, conduct outreach with area landlords for resettlement. The housing of a refugee is critical to long-term refugee integration. [Promising Practices for Refugee Housing](#) gives an excellent overview of housing challenges and case studies. Choosing housing and providing for furniture and household items is one of the most visible and apparent aspects of welcome. The location of the refugee's home greatly affects his experience in the coming year. While it is always possible for the refugee to move after a few months, it is best to find a great first apartment so that the family or individual can access resources and feel at home – permanently – in their new community. Here is some guidance on choosing a location for a refugee family to make it a success:

*Note: Try to ignore any previous perceptions of a neighborhood – instead, look into concrete data to inform your decision. Maybe you heard that a neighborhood was “bad,” but it is affordable, has a local grocery store, is on the crossroads of 4 bus lines, and has a low degree of crime. Actively look into all neighborhoods, even ones that you might not have initially considered.*

*The apartment should be within walking distance of these services/amenities:*

1. Grocery store (ideally with culturally appropriate food). This should not be a convenience store, but a full-service grocery store with produce.
2. Public transportation lines (bus, train, commuter rail, shuttle services).
3. Laundry facility (preferably in the apartment complex, or at least a very short walk away).

*The apartment should be within public transportation access of these services/amenities:*

1. Health Center that accepts Medicaid.
2. Schools (many schools do not provide transportation, particularly if the family lives within a mile away).
3. Community center or community programming, such as parks and a library.
4. Bank, ideally with no-fee checking available.

*The area surrounding the apartment should be safe.* Refugees are often fleeing extreme violence and looking for safe, yet affordable, communities to call home. While random acts of violence occur in the United States, the apartment must be located in a largely safe area.

*The landlord is on board with renting to refugees.* There are several guides for landlords thinking of renting to refugees, including [Renting to Refugees](#) from Colorado Refugee Service Program, this article on [Why Landlords Love Renting to Refugees](#), Episcopal Migration Ministries' [Answers to Common Landlord Questions](#), or these tips on [working with landlords](#) and maintaining good relationships with them from the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

**Choose the right apartment:** Once you have located the right neighborhood, block, or landlord, consider a few other points before committing to an apartment.

1. *Basic Housing Needs Checklist:* The apartment must meet these requirements: appropriate living space and bedrooms for all tenants, emergency exits, locks on doors and windows, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, at least one window, heat, ventilation, lighting, water, and bathroom facilities. The apartment must also not have visible mold, rodent infestation, lead paint, or flaking or peeling paint.

2. *Family needs:* Be cognizant of the family you are helping to resettle. *Are there multiple small children in a single parent household?* If so, apartments on the upper floors of a walk-up may impose significant inconvenience and should be avoided if possible. Small children on top floors might also create noise

*Note: HIAS NY and volunteers must avoid any conflict of interest regarding apartment leases or service provision. Ensure that every rented apartment meets the requirements listed above and is not chosen due to affiliation with a volunteer that is serving a refugee. If there is any association with the landlord and the volunteer or institution, check with the case manager before renting.*

for their downstairs neighbors. The proximity of parks or public spaces may also be important. *Is there someone who is over 50 years of age?* Elderly individuals may similarly find stairs difficult. Refugees who have lived in refugee camps for 10+ years and who are as young as 50-55 may find stairs difficult. *Does any family member have a disability?* HIAS NY can give guidance on the needs of a particular refugee family in light of any physical disabilities or needed accommodations. Additionally, if the family has family members close by, they too might have a preference on apartment location.

3. *Cost:* Housing price can have a huge impact on a refugee household's budget and long-term financial stability. Refugees are likely to continue to reside in their first home for three-five years in the United States. When choosing an apartment, balance amenities with cost, but be realistic about income expectations for newly arrived refugees and ask the case manager if you need more guidance on price for your area. Although renting a nice apartment that is "a little" more expensive seems like a lovely indulgence, it can have long term implications.

### **1ii) Prepare the Apartment for the Refugee Family's Arrival**

#### **Furnish the Apartment & Provide Household Items:**

Many of the necessary furnishings are common sense, but the federal government has very specific requirements for furnishing each refugee's apartment, including requirements on the number of cutlery, amount of closet-space, etc. If possible, feel free to go above and beyond the checklist to welcome the family into a warm living space. Donated items must be new or lightly used and in good condition; heavily used items and those in disrepair (torn, infested, dirty) are not acceptable. Great resources for used furniture and new donated household items include [Habitat Re-Stores](#), [Goodwill](#), local Bed Bath and Beyond

*Note: The children in your community can draw a card or hang a banner in the apartment to welcome the family. If there are young children, you can add some small toys to the apartment. Think of simple toys that are universal: blocks, (washable!), crayons or colored pencils, dolls, toy cars, soccer ball. Avoid old toys, anything messy, or very culturally-specific (at least initially).*

donations, local hotels, and [Craigslist](#) Classifieds. When setting up the apartment, keep all items in original packaging so arriving refugees know which items are new.

**Utilities:** The refugee family or individual will need to have basic utilities upon arrive. These include: heat, hot water, electricity, air conditioning (if applicable), and a landline. All of these utilities must be ready and turned on in advance of arrival.

**Buy or Make Ready-to-Eat and Culturally-Appropriate Food:** This can be a home cooked meal, or bought hot items, for the refugee family's first night in the United States. The fridge should be stocked with enough food for all household members until they will go to the grocery store themselves. Refugees will likely be tired and a bit overwhelmed directly after arrival, so hosting a large welcome dinner with social interactions may be best if kept for the days after arrival.

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The following activities are to occur at the time of the refugee's arrival, until approximately 2 weeks after arrival. This section includes information on how HIAS NY will work with host organizations and volunteers to: a) pick up the refugee family and conduct the: b) home safety orientation, c) lease signing & housing orientation, and d) grocery store visit and orientation.

### **1a) HIAS NY and Volunteer(s) Pick up the Refugee Family**

As the primary conduits of initial welcome, the Housing Volunteer is encouraged to participate in picking up the refugee family from their mode of transport (sometimes refugees arrive by plane, and sometimes by van from another airport). The case manager will not know until 2-3 days before the refugees' arrival about what time they arrive. Refugees may arrive very late in the night or during the work day, so it is a good idea for various volunteers to be "on call." Keep in mind that:

1. Typically, refugees travel for upwards of 48 hours to reach the United States and arrive exhausted, sick at times, hungry, and very anxious. A warm welcome will alleviate some fears and provide reassurance that the new Americans have a strong future in the United States. Be cognizant of cultural differences at arrival, as refugees may not have adjusted to American greeting or norms of behavior. For a guide to cultural norms abroad, see this resource from [Culture Crossing](#).

2. Sometimes, refugees crave immediate answers to complex questions (how much is assistance? How long will it last? When will children start school?). As much as possible, try to avoid answering questions immediately – they will definitely get answers and be in a better state to receive them after a night's sleep. Do not answer questions when you are not certain of the answer.

### **1b) Home Safety Orientation**

Within 24 hours of arrival, HIAS NY will conduct an initial home visit and will conduct a thorough home safety orientation. This must include:

- ☐ A tour of each room in the apartment, pointing out materials provided and describing or demonstrating each item's use, and letting the family know that these items are theirs.



- ☐ Proper use of a toilet (sitting, not standing; flushing) use of toilet paper, and what can/cannot be flushed.
- ☐ How to turn on the shower, how to make the water colder and warmer.
- ☐ Keeping the shower curtain in the bathtub/shower to prevent water damage.
- ☐ Stove safety – turn on/off the gas, including demonstrating understanding (recommended to target the female head of household(s) as they typically prepare meals and may be more reluctant to demonstrate competency), what to do if they smell gas.
- ☐ Running tap water and explaining that the water is safe to drink.
- ☐ Prepared food (it helps to serve the food to the refugees, particularly children).
- ☐ Home address of the refugee, phone number of case manager and point person from community, Emergency number (911) written down in an easily accessible location.
- ☐ Temperature controls (heat & A/C).
- ☐ Storing chemicals out of the reach of children (be sure that chemicals are already stored out of reach prior to the family's arrival – NOT under the sink unless there are child protection locks).
- ☐ Unlocking and locking of the front door from the inside and the outside and the windows (all adults should demonstrate competency) – before you leave the apartment, you should check that the door locked behind you.
- ☐ Demonstrating use of blinds (if applicable) and windows.
- ☐ Dishwasher/disposal use and safety.
- ☐ How to use a fire extinguisher

### **1c) Lease Signing & Housing Orientation (within the first week)**

**Lease signing:** Based on the arrangements with the particular landlord, the family or individual will sign the lease in their name. Accompany the family to the appointment and make sure they understand everything, through an interpreter if necessary. HIAS NY will ensure that the refugee(S) understand all key points in the leases, including the rent amount, rent due date, late fee if rent is late, responsibilities to keep the apartment clean and neat, move out procedures, and what to do if the apartment needs repairs.

**Change of Address Form:** All refugees are required to notify United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) within 10 days when they change addresses within the United States (including their first address). HIAS NY staff will complete the AR-11 with the refugee(s) during the intake interview or within 10 days as required. Find the form here: [Change of Address Requirement](#) (Form AR-11). Tell refugees about this form, and if they do move, it is very important that they complete it in order to receive mail at their new address and apply for citizenship in the future. Refugees can change their address [online](#) or by [mail](#). Each family member needs a completed form.

### **1d) Cultural Orientation**

*All refugees receive cultural orientation on multiple topics during the first 90 days after their arrival.*

**Housing Orientation:** Housing orientation is part of cultural orientation. For curriculum and materials see resources from the Cultural Orientation Center: the [Housing Curriculum](#), [Housing Resources](#) for orientation, and what can and cannot go in the [garbage disposal](#). [Welcome to Your New](#)

Home in 12 languages from the Office of Refugee Resettlement is also a good resource to give to refugees. It is important to focus on self-sufficiency following the housing orientation, particularly with the landlord and surrounding community services. In particular, emphasize:

*Note: Sometimes, refugee families learn that their family or friends have been resettled in another county or state, and want to “out-migrate” to join them. Talk to the case manager if the family discusses outmigration.*

**Repairs:** Teaching refugees how to report their own repairs is crucial in self-sufficiency and family safety. Use these Repair Guides in 11 languages to help facilitate communication (refugees can go to the landlord with this guide and point to the problem if English is limited).

**Walking over Driving:** When going to surrounding areas shortly after arrival, walk with the refugee household instead of driving (as much as possible, considering age and capacity of the client).

It will help them return to the location at a later time, and though it may be far, or hot, or seem nicer to drive refugees to their destination, it is more productive for self-sufficiency to facilitate a sense of direction and general community orientation.

**Landlord Relationships:** It is crucial that the refugee family has a positive relationship with their landlord or rental office. If there is a problem, it helps if the landlord knows the refugee and have had previous positive interactions.

**Being a Good Neighbor:** Refugee families will have varied ideas of what it means to be a good neighbor that may differ from their new neighbors. It may be a good idea to explore their ideas and offer suggestions of how they can demonstrate helpfulness and openness to their neighbors. Refer to the CAL Housing guide for tips on how to have these discussions.

**Grocery Store Visit and Orientation:** Shortly after arrival, the family will need to shop for their first set of groceries. Host Organizations should have a budget for groceries until the refugee(s) are able to receive their SNAP benefits, which may take up to 45 days. When taking refugee families to a grocery store, make sure to find one that is close to their home and ideally provides cheap and ethnically appropriate food. If the local supermarket does not have an aisle with international foods, try looking for a smaller international grocery store and suggest this as an additional resource. However, for the first few weeks, utilize the local store, and prioritize walking or taking the bus with them instead of driving, so that they learn how to get there on their own.

The first trip to the grocery store can be an important moment for a refugee, who may have lived years with limited nutritional options. Refugees may see their first grocery store visit as a moment to demonstrate to their family that they are in America (by buying Coca Cola, Chips or Snickers). It's okay to let them buy non-nutritious grocery items, but be sure to accompany them on the trip, give input as needed, and guide them through the store. It is helpful to have pictures of animals (pig and cow in particular) for the meat section if the refugee family does not speak English.

After the family gets settled in (perhaps for their second/third time going to the store), a guided orientation of the grocery store is needed. For some refugees, this may be the first time they buy food in a grocery store or supermarket. Many countries will instead sell food in open air or street markets, where prices are negotiable and bargaining is common. The amount of food, particularly processed and junk food, available in supermarkets can be overwhelming and very tempting, but be sure to emphasize the importance of sticking to their budget and buying fresh, healthy foods rich in nutrients and low in calories. Often, these healthier foods are located on the edges of supermarkets rather than in the middle. For additional guidance in what is important to teach, see What do You Learn in a Grocery Store Tour, Food Orientation, Cultural Considerations in Nutrition and Food Preparation, or SNAP-Ed Connection. If the family has particular medical conditions and need special diets (e.g. diabetes or hypertension), creating or locating condition-specific materials can be critical.

*Note: The local grocery store might not have all the ingredients that a family needs in order to prepare their traditional dishes. After speaking with the family, try to connect them with existing communities from the same country or region, or research a specific grocery store that might have what they need. Perhaps a trip once a month will be sufficient to stock up on certain goods that they cannot find elsewhere. Certain ingredients may be very important to the family, and can help them continue their culinary tradition (which is often healthier and easier than learning new "American" recipes).*

Discuss the following themes and topics with the refugee individual or family:

- ☐ Encourage them to sign up for a rewards card if applicable.
- ☐ Remind them to grab a basket or cart on their way in and to place items in the cart as they go.
- ☐ Explain to the refugee that food prices in grocery stores are fixed, and are listed either on the product or on the shelf below the product. Show them the different types of prices: per unit, per pound, etc.
- ☐ Point them to the signs explaining what food items are located in different aisles, making sure to highlight the produce sections and the ethnic or international food aisle.
- ☐ Encourage them to ask a worker in a uniform if they are unsure where to find a certain item. If they make a list ahead of time, they can point to an item on the list to help avoid language barriers between them and the store staff.
- ☐ Instruct them of any special procedure for buying produce, such as weighing it, placing it in a bag, or marking down the product number.
- ☐ Walk them through the check-out process, from putting items on the conveyer belt, placing the check-out divider ahead of their own groceries, and paying with any coupons or food stamps that they have.
- ☐ Encourage them to bring reusable bags when possible, because in many grocery stores this will save the family money.

**Food Stamps:** All refugees are eligible for SNAP (Food Stamp) benefits upon arrival. The case manager will schedule an appointment or walk-in visit with the Department of Social Services (DSS) or similar agency to apply for Food Stamps. Once the refugee family has a Benefit card, they will need to be shown how to use it at the grocery store. Typically, the Benefit Card acts as a debit card, with money put on the card on a certain day of the month and the family can spend down until the same day the next month.

A few things to keep in mind:

- Refugees do not need to go to the DSS office monthly to “renew” their card, it happens automatically (similar to a direct deposit from an employer).
- If a refugee family’s employment status or income changes, they are required to submit that information to DSS within 30 days.
- Individuals and families need to recertify their benefits with DSS every six months.
- If the Food Stamps money run out, there is no more assistance for food for the family, but the refugees can access [local food banks](#) until the next Food Stamps disbursement. Paying attention to price in the grocery store is critical. Most families will find that the food stamp budget is very tight and have to plan accordingly.
- Food stamps may not be used to eat in restaurants, for non-food items (e.g. toothpaste), cigarettes, or alcohol. If they purchase these items along with food and pay with their Food Stamps card, the outstanding balance will be for the non-food items and have to be paid in cash.
- If the Food Stamps card has a PIN number, refugees should not write that number on the card itself or on a paper in their wallet. This is extremely common, particularly for elderly refugees or those with low English levels or numeracy. If refugees cannot remember their PIN, suggest they store the PIN number in their sock or sleeve.
- Showing refugees how to check their Food Stamp card balance themselves is very helpful. Often the balance is printed at the bottom of grocery store receipts.
- For more information, see the [USDA brochure](#), [Choose My Plate](#), and [SNAP-Ed](#).

WIC: [Women, Infants, and Children](#) (WIC) is nutrition assistance for pregnant women and children under five. HIAS NY will likely arrange the WIC appointment, so contact the Health Lead to confirm the family has WIC checks. It may take several trips to the grocery store to learn how to use WIC checks because shopping relies on English literacy. It is very important that refugees learn how to use WIC checks themselves so they do not rely on volunteers to purchase food. Though it may seem easier to consistently help the refugee pick out WIC items, it is critical for food access that they are able to access WIC themselves. You can draw small pictures of food items on the WIC checks to encourage learning and self-sufficiency. For more information, call your local WIC office, check the [WicWorks Website](#) or [Frequently Asked Questions](#). Depending on language and need, there are also a plethora of WIC curricula and materials on WicWorks and created by public health schools and universities. Practically, you may need the [List of Allowed Foods by State](#).

## 2. Extended Orientation and Settling In

Mid-term activities for the housing pathway allow the refugee individual or family to feel further integrated into the neighborhood and in control of their housing and community wellbeing. This includes: a) conduct extended home and hygiene orientation, b) foster neighbor introductions, c) conduct periodic home check-ins, d) access donated clothing and furniture items.

### 2a) Conduct Extended Home Orientation

Refugees come from a variety of backgrounds and lifestyles. Their knowledge of cleanliness, housing, and city living will differ widely and a more thorough home orientation is a good idea for all families. Start with a “pre-test” before teaching a subject with a refugee family. For example, prior to talking about refrigeration, ask what the family thinks should be in the fridge, versus the counter and the cabinet. Then you can build on the refugee’s knowledge and go in depth with explanations.

Suggested topics for an extended orientation include:

- ☐ Trash (including pick up routine, recycling, where to dispose of bulk trash – such as unwanted chairs/couches) and recycling.
- ☐ Proper disposal of trash items (in toilet, trash, garbage disposal, sink).
- ☐ Food safety (expiration dates, washing, etc.).
- ☐ Food storage (refrigerator, freezer, cabinet, countertop, pantry) and storage temperature
- ☐ Supervision of children in the home (for ages and supervision, see: [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#) and [NSPCC](#)).
- ☐ Cleaning methods for all apartment areas (e.g. bathtub, sink, carpets).
- ☐ Laundry (machines, proper soap, bleach, behavioral norms if communal laundry).
- ☐ Dangers (garbage disposal, chemicals, electrical outlets).
- ☐ Preventing infestations and rodents.
- ☐ Fire safety (alarms, review extinguisher use, prevention, microwave use).

Ensure the family is competent in all of these areas by asking open ended questions before moving on to other topics. For lessons on many of the above topics, see COR’s Curriculum for [Housing](#) and [Health](#). If possible, it is better to use actual items rather than pictures. For example, cleaning the sink with the family instead of showing a picture, or using their actual oven to demonstrate baking rather than talking abstractly is very helpful and will increase retention with adult learners.

**Household Item ESL:** When training on these subjects, it is an ideal time to practice ESL of basic household items. It is encouraged to paste the English (and native language) names next to common items and practice them during every stay. This is an easy way to engage and can help families gain confidence and gain a sense of ownership over their apartment and items.

## **2b) Foster Neighbor Introductions**

Very often, refugees never meet or have a relationship with their neighbors due to linguistic and cultural differences. However, there are many reasons why a family should meet their neighbors. First, knowing neighbors will make a refugee safer: neighbors are more likely to help address, report, and stop crimes or other problems if they know the family and their background. Second, knowing neighbors increases a refugee’s sense of belonging and local community, particularly because many refugees come from much more communal societies than those largely found in the United States. Finally, at a time when refugees are highlighted in the news (both positively and negatively), it is increasingly crucial to form personal connections to decrease xenophobia and increase cross-cultural bridges. Although creating these bridges may feel uncomfortable for a volunteer, it is much more difficult for a new arrival to make introductions when they don’t know the cultural norms.

As a housing volunteer, you can facilitate these connects in the following ways:



- Straightforward introductions (name, origin, agreeing to be a resource if something happened, if they need to borrow something or vice versa).
- Baking treats from the refugee's home country and packing them to bring to neighbors to make introductions.
- Offering to schedule play dates between neighbor children, children of the volunteers, and refugee's children.
- Going through "Good Neighbor" Lesson on page 32 of COR's [Housing Curriculum](#) (translated in [Arabic Curriculum](#)) and talking with the family about how to be good neighbors to those they met (e.g. helping carry groceries).

## 2d) Access to Donated Clothing and Furniture Items

Many refugees arrive with nothing more than a bag to call their own. While they are getting settled, you may need to help them find resources for additional clothing and food items. Many refugees will be getting used to a new climate, which may require clothing that is different from their usual wardrobe. Make sure refugees are prepared for whatever weather may come their way, and show them places to find jackets, boots, gloves, rain coats, and other gear. The children might need specific uniforms for school. Check out [Goodwill](#), [The Salvation Army](#), and other organizations to see if they have a branch in your area to purchase clothing and other supplies at discounted prices.

*Note: Even though a refugee may arrive with limited material resources, they will not necessarily accept donated items. In some cultures, wearing previously-used clothing is a sign of a very low social class, and while they may be economically poor in the United States, they may have been of a higher class in their home country. Be aware of this. It is not a sign of ingratitude, and while keeping in mind their finances, give families the choice to accept donated items or purchase new.*

## 3. Neighborhood Integration

Integration into immediate host communities is extremely challenging, but can enhance refugee safety, feelings of belonging, access to targeted resources, education, and mental health. Long-term integration activities will be specific to the host communities and can be extensive. The following are some ways the Housing Volunteer can facilitate refugee integration in this area:

**Community Centers:** Many communities are centered around a communal space where homework-help, sports, friends, classes, and resources are located. This may be an intimidating place for the refugee to access alone, so going with the refugee or family the first few times may make them feel more comfortable. Locating cross-cultural centers or programs targeting international populations can be particularly fruitful.

Connects with community connections pathway!  
See page 2 in the community guide.

**English Conversation Groups:** If the neighborhood has many foreign-born residents, the neighborhood may have conversation groups for residents to meet and practice English. If there is no

such group, it is possible that a small group (3-4 neighbors) will be interested. This is something that a volunteer can suggest and guide a refugee family to start.

**Neighbor or Building Pot Luck:** Organize a pot luck for neighbors to gather and share food and conversation with one another. This can be organized every 2-3 months and can engage and reengage neighbors with the refugee family, allowing cross-cultural bonds to form.

**Homework Help:** If a refugee connects with a neighboring family and has a child around the same age, it may be helpful to arrange homework help during the evenings. The refugee child and their neighbor can work on homework together, increasing ties and helping the refugee more quickly learn classroom material and integrate into the school.

**Neighborhood Festivals or Block Parties:** Neighborhoods occasionally host block parties or celebrations that a refugee may not know about or may not feel comfortable attending alone. Many families fear these events are for certain groups, require invitations, or cost money. Stay in the loop, or connect with local notice boards, newspapers, or online forums to keep an eye out for celebrations so that the refugee family can connect with their host communities. Attend such events with the refugee family if you are able.

Finally, since much of refugee resettlement hinges on community and housing relationships, it is important to cultivate the relationship with the landlord for future refugee resettlement. This may include taking in additional refugee families, giving a reduction on rent, promising to let the refugee move-in early before the lease signing, agreeing to waive part of the security deposit, or other policies.

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Housing and neighborhood integration is a broad and multi-faceted aspect of refugee resettlement, but symbolizes a unified sense of stability and home that many refugees have been seeking for years. It is the hope of HIAS NY that volunteers can go beyond the activities listed here to think creatively about welcome and how it ties into the Housing Pathway. If there are any questions about these or other materials, please do not hesitate to contact HIAS NY.

## **Health Pathway: Volunteer Guide**

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## **Best Practices for all Volunteers**

### **1. Encourage Self-Sufficiency**

In any service, interaction, or appointment, always encourage self-sufficiency. It might feel helpful or be faster to do tasks *for* the refugee, but it is always better to do things *with* the refugee. Your efforts should educate and empower the refugee, not create dependency. It is alright and encouraged to draw healthy boundaries. She should learn how to do things independently so she can take control of her life, because volunteers will not be able to provide support indefinitely. Help establish a lifestyle for the refugee that can be maintained without your assistance after your volunteer service ends.

### **2. Understand Strengths**

Even though the refugee may have gone through many hardships, they are still the best person to make decisions that affect their lives. Be careful not to interpret a lack of English skill as a lack of experience or capability; these two characteristics are unrelated. Always try to think about refugees through a strength-based lens, instead of focusing on roadblocks or challenges. Create tangible goals with the refugee that tap into their strengths, and work towards their short-term goals and long-term dreams.

### **3. Ensure Comprehension**

As you interact with the refugees or witness other service providers interacting with refugees, pause and check for comprehension. Did they understand my question? Is the doctor using the right interpreter? Are they able to read this school registration packet? Did the insurance agent speak too quickly? Whenever possible and necessary, utilize trained interpreters who speak a language that the refugee is comfortable with. In certain situations, an interpreter is legally required to assist with interactions, such as medical settings, legal environments (with police) and with government-funded organizations (public schools). Comprehension can be verified by asking the refugee what they've understood from the conversation, offering an interpreter to assist, or asking follow-up questions.

### **4. Be Aware: Trauma-Informed Care**

Refugees come from a range of backgrounds and experiences. Not all refugees have experienced violent trauma as a product of war or violence, but all refugees have experienced some degree of trauma due to their displacement as refugees. It's important to be aware and sensitive to this, without being overly reactionary or presumptuous. Stress and anxiety due to trauma can manifest itself in many different ways. Perhaps the refugee is reluctant to trust you, after years of living in a volatile environment where she always had to be on guard. Maybe he is reluctant to become independent and exhibits low confidence, after being marginalized for so long. And sometimes, trauma can lead to depression, thoughts of suicide, or abuse. If you are concerned about a particular individual, speak to staff at HIAS NY. Read an overview of trauma-informed care here: [SAMHSA](#) and about the "Bag of Rocks" Metaphor here: [Refugee Health TA](#).

### **5. Advocate for the Refugee When Appropriate**

As you support the refugees in their everyday lives, speak up when you think they need an extra person on their team. For example, if you go the doctor's office for an appointment, and the Arabic interpreter that was promised over the phone is not present, politely approach someone about the issue. They cannot start the appointment without an interpreter and the refugee has a right to timely,

comprehensive care. If you think someone has treated the refugee unfairly, take note of the issue and speak with a staff member at HIAS NY about your concerns. It may be necessary to document the concern or make a complaint.

#### 6. Find Balance Between Cultural Environments

Refugees come from a variety of cultures, traditions, legal systems, family structures, and living conditions that may conflict with their new environment in the United States. Sometimes families need to make considerable modifications to their ways of life in new and unexpected ways. It is important to respect their culture and tradition, while still ensuring that they understand their new environment and the set of standards that they must adhere to: laws, leases, contracts, bill payments, child protections, and safety.

#### 7. Manage Expectations

Both you and the refugee will approach the next year of resettlement with a set of expectations. The refugee family has been trying to resettle in new country for years, and has come to view America as the answer to displacement. During this time, family members have heard about America from a variety of sources with varying degrees of reliability, and formed a set of hopes, expectations, and opinions about America before arriving. Likewise, you have also formed a set of opinions about refugees and the resettlement process, shaped by a similarly wide array of sources. Remember to meet the refugee where they are, and not expect a certain type of relationship with the family. Be patient with the family and approach your relationship with humility, openness, and understanding.

#### 8. Be Aware of Power Dynamics

Although the refugees should always be viewed as capable and independent, you are ultimately the guide and volunteer, and can accidentally fall into an unhealthy power dynamic with the refugee. Avoid situations where the refugee may feel compelled to do something outside of their comfort zone due to a need to please you or the other volunteers. For example, try not to put the refugee on the spot by asking her to speak about her country. Do not imply that he should attend certain social events if he is not genuinely interested. If the goal of the activity is to directly create further self-sufficiency and independence for the refugee, then it is important; if not, then approach the situation sensitively.

#### 9. Start Learning the Refugee's Language

As the refugees start to develop their English skills, you can also simultaneously start learning their language. There are many resources online that can teach how to say basic phrases in a variety of languages, from Swahili to Hakha Chin. Be sure to identify the dialect that the refugee speaks: for example, Arabic spoken in Syria is quite different from Arabic spoken in Morocco, and sometimes unintelligible. A few key phrases in a refugee's native language can go a long way in building trust and mutual respect.

#### *\*Recording your Volunteer Time and Donations*

*Throughout your time as a volunteer, it is important to keep records of everything you are donating, including hours, material goods, and driving mileage. HIAS NY may request this information, particularly for some programs (such as the Matching Grant employment program) You also may be able to receive personal tax deductions on some contributions.*



## 1. Preparation, Screenings and Referrals

*HIAS NY is ultimately responsible for the provision of all Reception and Placement (R&P) Services. Members of the health committee will undergo HIAS NY's health training and will coordinate regularly with HIAS NY staff.*

This first section focuses on the pre-arrival activities that *should start happening 2 weeks before arrival, or as soon as you find out that a family is due to arrive.*

### 1i) Prepare to Meet Family's Medical Needs (Pre-Arrival)

*This section depends on close collaboration with HIAS NY. If there is important health information that will impact the family's needs, HIAS NY staff may discuss this with the health committee. Because this information is confidential, however, it may only be shared with the health committee.*

**Medical Packet:** Before coming to the United States, all refugees undergo an overseas refugee medical exam. This exam ensures that the individual has no communicable diseases prior to travel to the United States, and that they are healthy enough to undertake the international journey. In this documentation, HIAS NY staff will learn about any existing medical conditions within the family. This documentation is sparse and usually incomplete, and is not meant to serve as a comprehensive medical assessment.

Some refugees are extremely medically vulnerable upon arrival, others are not. Regardless of health status, all pre-arrival medical documents need to be brought to the refugee health screening.

**Medications:** Most refugees should arrive with at least a 30-day supply of any needed medications, but this is not always the case. These medications and dosages should also be included in the medical paperwork.

### 1ii) Survey Community Resources (Pre-Arrival)

Conduct a preliminary survey of community health facilities in your area. Refugees often come to the United States with pre-existing conditions that have been neglected due to a lack of medical care during years of displacement. Assess the resources in the following areas. Reach out to a medical service provider, and check if: 1) accept Medicaid insurance, 2) they work with international populations, 3) are "trauma informed," and 4) have access to interpretation resources, e.g. through a phone line, in a wide-range of languages (not only Spanish).

Core resources:

Health clinics (including vaccination clinics)  
Hospitals and medical centers  
Dentists, particularly low-cost dentists  
Women, Infants and Children Office (WIC)  
OBGYN providers  
Opticians  
Other specialists (ENT, pediatrics)  
Mental health services

Supplemental resources:

Food pantries  
Substance abuse clinics  
Domestic violence shelters/programs  
Disability services/adult day programs  
LGBTQI\* community centers  
Clinics for uninsured/underinsured  
Community gardens

Not all of these community resources will be utilized over the next few months, but it is recommended that you develop a familiarity with the web of services available to a refugee family. We recommend maintaining a list or map of resources, with information on referral processes, contacts, services, and locations. Should they need to access a particular clinic or hospital, you will be able to immediately direct them to a suitable service provider.

*\*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex*

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**1a) Schedule and Accompany to Preliminary Health Appointments**

**Refugee Health Assessment (RHA):** All refugees need to attend a preliminary health screening with a primary care physician in a certified medical facility. HIAS NY staff will make an appointment at the certified facility closest to the refugee's home and may ask for your help with transportation. The medical screening will address general health concerns and identify any points that need further attention and follow up. There are some services that are required to be administered per the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), but other services are optional. Although these appointments can be rushed, the refugee should ask the medical provider about any further concerns or issues so he/she can be referred to the appropriate services.

*Note: In ALL health appointments, ensure that the refugee is receiving proper interpretation services. Keep an eye out for misunderstandings or issues, such as the provider expecting the refugee to be literate in their home language, the provider talking to you instead of the refugee, the provider not allowing the interpreter adequate time in between sentences, or the refugee giving responses that don't seem to match the question. See "Interpretation Best Practices" for more information.*

**Dental Appointment:** All family members should receive an initial dental appointment for a teeth cleaning, instruction on teeth brushing and proper oral health, and to receive a list of recommended further services. Dental services are rarely included in refugee health services overseas; thus, some of the most untreated health issues faced by recently arrived refugees in the US are related to oral health. Although cleanings and screenings may be covered by insurance, many follow-up services are not covered and are usually quite expensive. Paying for dental services should not take precedence over other more pressing financial needs, such as paying rent or buying food. Search for the most-cost effective dental services in the community and

*Speak with the refugee about their options.* Sometimes dental schools provide dental services for free. Some children may need orthodontic work; again, search for a cost-effective option in the community.

**Vision Screening:** A screening may be administered by the physician at the initial health screening, but oftentimes does not result in a comprehensive vision assessment. If the refugee complains of foggy vision or you or another volunteer sense an issue, bring this to the attention of HIAS NY staff who will work with the family/individual to schedule a vision screening with a specialist. Many services and basic frames are covered by insurance.

**Specialist Referrals:** Many refugees will need referrals and or appointments at other specialists. HIAS NY may ask for your recommendation if a refugee requires a consultation or examination with a specialist. All health information must be kept confidential. You may also be asked to accompany the refugee to the appointment if appropriate. Depending on the type of facility where RHA was conducted, the doctor who conducted the RHA can sometimes generate referrals; other times, the refugee will need to actively seek out a different appointment with a primary care provider in another facility in order to obtain a referral. The refugee may be concerned about a particularly time-sensitive issue, so it is recommended that you actively try to facilitate these appointments.

### **1b) Youth Vaccinations**

Refugee children will have a range of vaccination histories; some will arrive with a comprehensive vaccination record, updated as recently as a few months ago, while others will arrive with no legitimate records and very little recollection of their shot history. Regardless of their history, almost every refugee child will need vaccinations upon arrival to the United States. Receiving vaccinations and staying in-compliance with school district regulations is often a complex process with multiple moving parts. Here, we try to explain a few key principles:

*Note: Some families may not be aware of a recorded vaccination history, but could have records included in their IOM arrival paperwork that they are unaware of. These papers are prepared by health professionals prior to arrival to the US.*

**School Regulations:** All school districts have strict regulations on vaccines. All students are required to follow a course of vaccinations throughout their school-aged years; without these vaccinations being administered and officially demonstrated to the school district, the child is at risk of being barred from school until the necessary vaccination records are produced and accepted.

Vaccinations are administered by health professionals over many years, and most vaccines occur in courses spaced out by months or years. Because a refugee child may need multiple courses of shots, the school is required to make exemptions. For example: Oula arrived with no Hepatitis A vaccines and she will be going into the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. The 3<sup>rd</sup> grade requires that she has completed her 3 courses of Hepatitis A vaccines, which are supposed to be spaced out by 6 months each. For the sake of Oula's health and the efficacy of the vaccination, she cannot receive all 3 vaccine courses in the few weeks before starting school. As long as Oula receives the first course of Hepatitis A vaccine, and returns to

the doctor after 6 months and 12 months to receive the rest and provides documentation to the school after each visit, she is considered to be in compliance with the school.

A health volunteer may accompany the family to their first vaccination appointment. If the volunteer is aware of any allergies, notify HIAS NY staff, so that they can communicate that to the provider.

### **1c) Orientation on Health System**

Throughout the first 90 days of resettlement, a series of cultural orientation modules will be delivered to the refugee family. HIAS NY will plan when to cover all 15 topics in cultural orientation. A family does not need to be educated on this material in one sitting; in fact, it is better if you first focus on the basics and only initially introduce further topics, then do a “deep dive” into more particular material as you and the refugees interact with those services. For example, touch on the concept of a pharmacy and what it can provide, but do a full pharmacy orientation when you have time to actually go to a pharmacy and walk around with the family and an interpreter.

#### **The following topics should be covered as part of healthcare orientation:**

**ER, Doctor or Pharmacy:** Introduce the three main places you can go if you have a medical concern: an emergency room, a doctor’s office, or a pharmacy. When do you go to each of these places? Talk about a few different scenarios. What should you do if your child is complaining about pain in his ear? If you have severe pain in your chest? If you have a runny nose or a cough? Talk about the ways to access each of these services. \* **Particularly, go over how and when to dial 911. Simulate a 911 conversation and phone call with all family members age 12 and up.** \* Stress that 911 is only for extreme emergencies, not for minor incidents (see here for more guidelines [When to Call 911](#)). 911 cannot always locate an individual on a cell phone, and the refugee will need to give their address and ask for an interpreter in English. The Cultural Orientation Resource Center has a comprehensive guide for refugee orientation, found here: [COR Welcome Guide](#). There are further ideas for scenarios under the “Health” section, as well as ideas for some of the following orientation components.

**Insurance:** Navigating the health insurance system in the United States is complex for native-born residents, and even more so for new Americans who many not be familiar with the concept of insurance. All refugees qualify for short-term refugee medical insurance (usually up to 8 months) and will then need to transition to Medicaid or another plan through the Affordable Care Act. Read more about these services here: [Office of Refugee Resettlement: Health Insurance](#). Explain the concept of insurance. How does it work at a fundamental level? Why is it important? What happens if you do not have active insurance, or go to a provider where your insurance is not accepted? What are the ways you can keep and maintain medical insurance in this country? For guidance on explaining the value of health insurance, look at [Healthcare.gov](#). There may also be an organization in your community that employs “[health care navigators](#).” Navigators are federally-funded employees who can help explain insurance plans to refugees (and other residents) and help them transition to a plan through the ACA.

**Medical Rights:** All refugees should be aware of their rights in the healthcare system, as they may be very different from their experiences abroad. Refugees have two basic rights in the medical system: 1) A right to language services and 2) a right to confidentiality and privacy. With an interpreter, explain these two rights and how they can work to empower refugees.

1) *Right to Language Services:* Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibit discrimination based on national origin and dictates that every facility that receives federal funding must provide interpreters for Limited English Proficient (LEP) customers. Refugees are entitled to language services in any

*Note: Some refugee individuals may identify as LGBTQ. They may or may not wish to disclose this information to you. Always avoid assumptions: e.g. if you need to ask about a former relationship, use the term “partner” instead of husband or wife, never make judgmental comments about LGBTQI individuals, and foster an inclusive and welcoming community environment. See more resources and advice here: [Rainbow Welcome](#).*

medical facility that accepts Medicaid (the vast majority) or receives government funding. This could be an in-person interpreter, phone interpreter, and translated materials. The service provider needs to offer interpretation services to all refugees, regardless of the language. If you suspect a violation of this law, you should direct your concerns to the Patient Relations department of the clinic/hospital. If the issue persists, consider filing a [Civil Rights Complaint](#). For more information about language access, see [LEP.gov](#), [Office for Civil Rights](#), [Health and Human Services](#), and the [Breaking the Language Barrier](#) video.

2) *Right to Confidentiality and Privacy:* Some individuals may be reluctant to talk to their doctor about certain issues due to a fear that the information will be shared with their family or community. Assure refugees that doctors take an oath to keep all information secret, unless you appear to be at risk of causing harm to yourself or others. Encourage refugees to share all health information with their providers, as this leads to more comprehensive care. All volunteers that hear information said in a private meeting between a patient and their doctor should keep that information strictly confidential, unless there is threat of harm to the individual or someone else. This includes not sharing information with other members of your institution, the refugee’s family, your spouse, your family, etc.

**Types of Medicine:** “Western” medicine is not always accepted or practiced in other countries and it is important to be aware of any discrepancies between the refugee’s traditional healing practices and Western medicine practices. Do not assume that the refugee is opposed to Western methods of healing, but it is important to keep this potential cultural clash on your radar. For example, a father might try to cure or disinfect an open wound with an herbal remedy and not think it necessary to go the doctor’s office. A woman might prefer to seek spiritual intervention to treat a terminal illness, instead of receiving treatment from a medical facility. Try to introduce Western medicine options without discounting their experience or culture. A few resources for providers can be found here ([Dimensions of Culture](#), [American Family Physician](#)). Additionally, don’t assume that Western medicine is a panacea for all illness; sometimes individuals need a combination of methods to achieve health and wellness. Often a combination of Western medicine and cultural medicinal practices will best support their physical and mental wellbeing.

**Pharmacies:** Pharmacies can be the most accessible resource for refugees to access medication for minor issues, but can be difficult to navigate without some sort of orientation process (read about the [Ohio State pharmacy orientation program](#) here). Go to a pharmacy, ideally within walking distance from the refugee's home, to talk about how to get the right type of medicine. Bring an interpreter if necessary.

At the pharmacy, talk about:

1. *Prescription vs. Non-Prescription Drugs:* discuss how some gentle, common medicines do not need a doctor's permission; for others, you need to make a doctor's appointment and gain permission
2. *Tour:* Of what is in the pharmacy
3. *Non-Prescription Medicine:* to be used when you have a cough, cold, sore throat, stomach ache, etc. Show where you can find these medicines
4. *Generics:* Show the generic brand, which is the same medicine but oftentimes cheaper
5. *Pharmacist:* Bring them to the pharmacist window, demonstrate how you can ask for guidance or help
6. *Teaching New Words:* Go over a few words that they might need to know, perhaps making small "symptom cards" with the word in English and their native language (e.g. cough, sore throat, headache, fever) to help them interact with the pharmacist
7. *Note:* Always remind them about the difference between needing a pharmacy and needing a hospital!

**When & How to Schedule a Doctor's Appointment:** Most medical services in the US can only be accessed by an appointment, which may conflict with the refugee's experience in their home country or country of asylum.

Touch on the following concepts:

1. *Referrals:* Your PCP may have to give a referral to certain specialists after an initial appointment.
2. *Annual exams:* scheduled months in advance. To "check-in," might not be for a specific issue
3. *Walk-Ins:* some clinics or vaccination programs might have walk-in time slots during the week

Additional important concepts:

- Being on time: Patients must arrive early or on time at most providers.
- Keeping track of all records, at home: Due to stringent confidentiality laws, it is safe to assume that medical providers will not automatically communicate with providers at another facility; it is best that the patient brings relevant records with them to each appointment (or ensure that relevant doctors have permission to communicate with one another).

**Mental Health:** A cultural orientation on mental health issues will be conducted by HIAS NY. These topics should not be addressed by volunteers.

**Women's & Men's Issues:** A cultural orientation on issues such as domestic violence, child bearing, forms of control, and access to information will be conducted by HIAS NY staff with a culturally competent educator. These topics should not be explained by volunteers.

## **1d) Orientation on Hygiene**



Since refugees come from a tremendous range of backgrounds and experiences, this may not be necessary for every family. Use your judgement on what information to discuss, as conversations about personal hygiene could be embarrassing for people if they already know the information. Gauge how they present themselves as you interact with them, or how their home looks when you visit. Consult with HIAS NY staff on what components to discuss.

**Personal Hygiene:** Importance of washing hands frequently, bathing regularly, using soap and shampoo. This will be important for general socialization, such as attending school, going to work, and using public transportation, and also important for a refugee's health (prevents sickness and contamination, skin rashes).

**Food Preparation and Storage:** What goes in the fridge, freezer, and counter, to prevent sickness or parasites. Importance of washing cutting boards, baby bottles, eating utensils and serving dishes, particularly after animal products. How to dispose of trash properly.

**Clothing:** How and where to wash and dry clothes, with a particular focus on clothing or school uniforms of children (as these tend to get dirty faster).

**Feminine Hygiene:** Where to buy pads/tampons, how to dispose (not down the toilet!). This website has many additional resources and ideas for teaching material: [HER project](#).

## 2. Connection to Resources

It is important to continue supporting refugees as they access important medical appointments, but it is just as important to introduce additional community supports that encourage long-term health and independence. Refer back to the survey of community resources conducted prior to the refugee's arrival and make necessary connections between the provider and refugee. We outline a few important options below.

**SSI Benefits:** If a refugee has a physical or mental disability or condition and cannot work for more than one year, it is possible for them to receive SSI benefits to receive financial support from the government. Adults and children are eligible to receive SSI. HIAS NY staff will be aware of any underlying health conditions that may qualify a family for SSI. *This process is lengthy and complex, but can make a tremendous difference in a refugee's life.* Consult HIAS NY staff to find organizations or individuals within your community who can help with the application process. To understand an overview of SSI, look here: [Disability Benefits Center](#) (particularly under "How to Qualify" and "Disability Resources"). If a refugee is eligible, it is important that they start the application process at the Social Security Administration as soon as they receive their social security card. Refugees with a disability will only be eligible to receive SSI for seven years after arrival, at which point they will be expected to have attained citizenship. It is critical that they adjust their immigration status to continue to receive benefits.

**Disability Services:** For qualified refugees, transportation services can be obtained through Medicaid and/or the local transit authority's paratransit service. This also may be available to elderly refugees. It is crucial that every refugee is able to independently attend their appointments. Training refugees on accessing available paratransit services is a critical step for self-sufficiency. Elderly individuals or those living with disabilities may qualify for [Adult Day Care](#) or Senior Day programs.

**Medical Case Management Services:** These services are sometimes available through the Medicaid insurance partners and can be crucial allies if you are able to develop a strong partnership. They are responsible for coordinating appointments and referrals for refugees and to keep track of the various elements of care coordination. Specific clinics may also have social work teams attached to them that can assist individuals with special medical conditions and help them coordinate their medical care.

**Community Gardening:** A blooming resource for refugees in many communities is access to a community garden. It allows refugee families to showcase any previous gardening or agriculture experience, connect with others in the community, and most importantly, feel empowered and in control of the food they eat (or the flowers they grow). Speak with the refugee family to see if they are interested in community gardening.

**Access to Food Donations:** Many refugee families are often very tight on money, so let families know that they can get free food from a food bank or food pantry, many of which are listed by state [here](#). Many churches, synagogues, and religious organizations have food pantries available to community members. If you are able to organize a food drive (and/or clothing drive) within your networks, you can tailor the drive to the needs of the family (for example, culturally-specific foods). For food drives, emphasize donating canned or nonperishable food, and for clothing drives, emphasize donating new or gently used clothing. A drive can be a great community building event for individuals who want to get involved but cannot make a serious time commitment. Many refugee families, however, may feel uncomfortable knowing that a donation drive was scheduled on their behalf. Keep the audience general, but make sure the refugee family has the opportunity to benefit.

*Note: Even though a refugee may arrive with limited material resources, they will not necessarily accept donated items. In some cultures, accepting donations is a sign of a very low social class, and while they may be economically poor in the United States, they may have been of a higher class in their home country. Be aware of this. It is not a sign of ingratitude, and while keeping in mind their finances, give families the choice to accept donated items or purchase new.*

### 3. Healthy Lifestyles

**Stress Management:** Though HIAS NY and communities try to provide as much guidance as possible, the resettlement process can be extremely challenging for refugees. USCRI publishes a refugee-specific toolkit titled [Overcoming Barriers](#) that serves as a great starting point for discussions on stress management. The pressures of finding a job, adjusting to a new culture, managing a family, going to class, and learning a new language can be incredibly overwhelming at times.

In addition, do your best to connect refugees to other supportive voices within the community. If the family expresses an interest, connect them to someone who speaks their language, or to another refugee family who has gone through the process and can provide guidance and support. Isolation can be one of the worst triggers for stress and anxiety, so connecting refugees to others through classes, after school programs, parenting support groups, fitness classes, and neighborhood groups is one of the best ways to ensure their long term health and success.

**Recreational Activities:** Identify recreational interests of refugees, both children and adults, and see if there are suitable programs in the community. Soccer is particularly popular across the world, and can often bring people together from diverse backgrounds. Reach out to a local YMCA, JCC, or community center to identify any programs of interest.

**Healthy Eating:** Continue to provide guidance and support with healthy eating as the family settles in. In particular, look out for foods that may seem nutritious, but are not, such as powdered fruit juice drinks, salty crackers, or too-sweet granola bars. Within the family, children are particularly susceptible to developing an unhealthy diet, since they quickly develop a taste for overly sweet, salty, or fatty foods that they may not have had access to previously. For an extensive curriculum on health education for adults, check out the [Dietary Guideline Workshop](#) from the US Department of Agriculture or translated documents on health and nutrition from the [US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants](#). The activities are intended for a larger group, and an American audience and palate, but some of the ideas and resources may be helpful.

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Volunteering on the Health Pathway can look very different depending on the health needs of the family, and oftentimes require determination, coordination, patience and advocacy. For many refugees who have been unable to access comprehensive health services, addressing critical health needs and developing a healthy lifestyle can drastically improve their quality of life. If there are any questions about these or other materials, please do not hesitate to contact HIAS NY staff.

## **Education Pathway for Youth: Volunteer Guide**

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## **Best Practices for all Volunteers**

### **1. Encourage Self-Sufficiency**

In any service, interaction, or appointment, always encourage self-sufficiency. It might feel helpful or be faster to do tasks *for* the refugee, but it is always better to do things *with* the refugee. Your efforts should educate and empower the refugee, not create dependency. It is alright and encouraged to draw healthy boundaries. She should learn how to do things independently so she can take control of her life, because volunteers will not be able to provide support indefinitely. Help establish a lifestyle for the refugee that can be maintained without your assistance after your volunteer service ends.

### **2. Understand Strengths**

Even though the refugee may have gone through many hardships, they are still the best person to make decisions that affect their lives. Be careful not to interpret a lack of English skill as a lack of experience or capability; these two characteristics are unrelated. Always try to think about refugees through a strength-based lens, instead of focusing on roadblocks or challenges. Create tangible goals with the refugee that tap into their strengths, and work towards their short-term goals and long-term dreams.

### **3. Ensure Comprehension**

As you interact with the refugees or witness other service providers interacting with refugees, pause and check for comprehension. Did they understand my question? Is the doctor using the right interpreter? Are they able to read this school registration packet? Did the insurance agent speak too quickly? Whenever possible and necessary, utilize trained interpreters who speak a language that the refugee is comfortable with. In certain situations, an interpreter is legally required to assist with interactions, such as medical settings, legal environments (with police) and with government-funded organizations (public schools). Comprehension can be verified by asking the refugee what they've understood from the conversation, offering an interpreter to assist, or asking follow-up questions.

### **4. Be Aware: Trauma-Informed Care**

Refugees come from a range of backgrounds and experiences. Not all refugees have experienced violent trauma as a product of war or violence, but all refugees have experienced some degree of trauma due to their displacement as refugees. It's important to be aware and sensitive to this, without being overly reactionary or presumptuous. Stress and anxiety due to trauma can manifest itself in many different ways. Perhaps the refugee is reluctant to trust you, after years of living in a volatile environment where she always had to be on guard. Maybe he is reluctant to become independent and exhibits low confidence, after being marginalized for so long. And sometimes, trauma can lead to depression, thoughts of suicide, or abuse. If you are concerned about a particular individual, speak to staff at HIAS NY. Read an overview of trauma-informed care here: [SAMHSA](#) and about the "Bag of Rocks" Metaphor here: [Refugee Health TA](#).

### **5. Advocate for the Refugee When Appropriate**

As you support the refugees in their everyday lives, speak up when you think they need an extra person on their team. For example, if you go to the doctor's office for an appointment, and the Arabic interpreter that was promised over the phone is not present, politely approach someone about the issue. They cannot start the appointment without an interpreter and the refugee has a right to timely, comprehensive care. If you think someone has treated the refugee unfairly, take note of the issue and

Speak with a staff member at HIAS NY about your concerns. It may be necessary to document the concern or make a complaint.

#### 6. Find Balance Between Cultural Environments

Refugees come from a variety of cultures, traditions, legal systems, family structures, and living conditions that may conflict with their new environment in the United States. Sometimes families need to make considerable modifications to their ways of life in new and unexpected ways. It is important to respect their culture and tradition, while still ensuring that they understand their new environment and the set of standards that they must adhere to: laws, leases, contracts, bill payments, child protections, and safety.

#### 7. Manage Expectations

Both you and the refugee will approach the next year of resettlement with a set of expectations. The refugee family has been trying to resettle in new country for years, and has come to view America as the answer to displacement. During this time, family members have heard about America from a variety of sources with varying degrees of reliability, and formed a set of hopes, expectations, and opinions about America before arriving. Likewise, you have also formed a set of opinions about refugees and the resettlement process, shaped by a similarly wide array of sources. Remember to meet the refugee where they are, and not expect a certain type of relationship with the family. Be patient with the family and approach your relationship with humility, openness, and understanding.

#### 8. Be Aware of Power Dynamics

Although the refugees should always be viewed as capable and independent, you are ultimately the guide and volunteer, and can accidentally fall into an unhealthy power dynamic with the refugee. Avoid situations where the refugee may feel compelled to do something outside of their comfort zone due to a need to please you or the other volunteers. For example, try not to put the refugee on the spot by asking her to speak about her country. Do not imply that he should attend certain social events if he is not genuinely interested. If the goal of the activity is to directly create further self-sufficiency and independence for the refugee, then it is important; if not, then approach the situation sensitively.

#### 9. Start Learning the Refugee's Language

As the refugees start to develop their English skills, you can also simultaneously start learning their language. There are many resources online that can teach how to say basic phrases in a variety of languages, from Swahili to Hakha Chin. Be sure to identify the dialect that the refugee speaks: for example, Arabic spoken in Syria is quite different from Arabic spoken in Morocco, and sometimes unintelligible. A few key phrases in a refugee's native language can go a long way in building trust and mutual respect.

#### *\*Recording your Volunteer Time and Donations*

*Throughout your time as a volunteer, it is important to keep records of everything you are donating, including hours, material goods, and driving mileage. HIAS NY may request this information, particularly for some programs (such as the Matching Grant employment program) You also may be able to receive personal tax deductions on some contributions.*

## 1. Registration Process

*HIAS NY is ultimately responsible for the provision of all Reception and Placement (R&P) Services. Members of the education committee will undergo HIAS NY's education training and will coordinate regularly with HIAS NY staff.*

*\*\*\*Note: Seek parental consent in advance for any direct interactions with minors. Avoid any interaction with one minor and one adult, unless in public or in a place where the interaction can be observed. It is always preferable to have more than one person present at all times. Be sure to adhere to child safety laws regarding car seats and seat belts for ALL situations when you are transporting minors. Refer to [SafeCar.gov](https://www.safercar.gov) for more information. Be wary of donated seats, and only accept car seats if you can identify the expiration date and assure that it has not been in an accident.*

School registration procedures depend on the school district. The following tasks are necessary for registration: a) Conduct pre-registration interview with the family, b) Schedule and attend an intake appointment, and c) Enroll at the school and conduct an orientation.

### **1a) HIAS NT Conducts Pre-Registration Interview During the Intake Interview**

HIAS NY staff, with an Interpreter if needed, ask a series of questions to gauge their educational level and experience such as:

1. What grade did each of the children complete? In what language? Where was the school?
2. Did they miss any years of school? For what reason?
3. What are they interested in, as a profession or as a hobby? What do they enjoy doing?
4. Are there any suspected learning difficulties?
5. Which languages are spoken at home? Are the children literate in their home language?
6. What is the educational level and literacy of the parents? In what languages?

**A Child with a Disability:** For any child with a learning disability, either diagnosed, or suspected but undiagnosed, it is incredibly important that you take steps in the beginning of the enrollment process to ensure a proper school placement and support structure. The child may qualify for an Individualized Education Plan, or an IEP. An IEP is a legally binding document that requires the school to make necessary accommodations for children with a disability through a very specific and time-bound plan that is written and drafted through family and school meetings. Read more about the process here: [Special Education Guide](#). The IEP process is complex and requires consistent follow up and strong advocacy, but is a legally-guaranteed service and families have the law on their side. If needed, HIAS NY will make the referral and communicate with the school regarding a child's IEP needs. HIAS NY encourages you to educate yourself on the process, educate and empower the family, and, if needed, work with HIAS NY to advocate through the process..

#### Key Points to Keep in Mind:

- The school is responsible for testing, not a medical doctor. While medical records help, the school is responsible for the determination process and cannot delay a determination based on the absence of medical records.
- Schools are bound by a very specific time frame for screening, testing, and consulting. The law dictates that this should be a fairly fast process – again, the law is on the child’s side.
- IEP accommodations are not to be confused with ESL accommodations, and should not be lumped together. Sometimes a school may account for a child’s low level of comprehension as an ESL problem, when in fact, it is due to an intellectual or developmental disability. It is important to separate the two; accurate school-based testing should be able to differentiate.

*Note: Some school districts might state that a birth certificate or passport is required. Many refugees do not have these documents; an I-94 can be used for these families instead. It’s a legal, government-issued ID that is given to refugees upon arrival and does not expire.*

*Note: All children 21 years or younger should be able to access a school program for youth. If the refugee student has not completed high school in their home country, but is over 21, they will need to attend a program dedicated to adults and cannot enroll in a traditional high school program for youth. “In between students” (teens age 18-21), have a few educational and career options that should be discussed with the family, such as GED programs, Job Corps, vocational training, or high school programs for over-age or under-credit young adults.*

**Interview and Intake Process as an ESL family:** This appointment will determine the school placement for the refugee youth. Through interviews and assessments, district staff will identify the language needs of the refugee student and make a suitable placement. Students with gaps in education might not continue in the next logical grade: for example, if Asma completed only the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade in Syria but she is 11 years old, she cannot enter the US school system as a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader. Her age will be strongly considered when placing her in a class and school program. This may be confusing to the family, but is intended to keep the age of student cohorts consistent throughout each grade level.

It’s important that throughout this process the family is assisted in communicating any other relevant information to the district office, including background information on the previous school environment and educational needs, such as special accommodations, suspected learning disabilities, or severe gaps in education. At the end of this appointment, the students should be assigned a school and grade that they will attend.

### **1c) School Enrollment and Orientation**

This is the last step for registration: the school enrollment. For this appointment, be sure an interpreter is present who can assist you with the process. This will allow the family to fully experience the school environment and give them the ability to ask questions and receive information. Some districts will provide an interpreter through the school, and this is ideal—otherwise HIAS NY will coordinate and provide a volunteer interpreter or staff member who speaks the refugee’s language. Call ahead to schedule an appointment with the school, or find out when they take walk-ins. Again, prepare all necessary documentation beforehand.

At the school appointment, try to empower the refugee family to fill out the enrollment forms. If they are unable to do so, and if HIAS NY staff are not present, encourage them to complete it on their own with help from the interpreter and the school. Pay particular attention to any allergies, food restrictions (including religious restrictions), or health concerns that the family communicates. Include emergency contact numbers of people that the family trusts. It is a good idea to include a HIAS NY staff member. Free or reduced lunch form should be completed, as all newly arrived refugee children are eligible.

**School Tour and Orientation:** Throughout the appointment, educate the family and make them feel familiar and comfortable with the school environment. Conduct the school orientation in conjunction with the school tour.

After registration, a school tour should include:

1. *School Offices:* Where is the central office and what do they do? Where is the nurse's office? When does the student go to the nurse?
2. *Gymnasium and Special Elective Areas:* When does he need to wear athletic clothes? What other things will be taught, outside of traditional classes?
3. *Lunch Room:* Where does he pick up the lunch? How can the parents communicate any student dietary restrictions (e.g. most Muslims do not eat pork) to the school or cafeteria manager? Do the students need a pin number to pay for lunch?
4. *Uniform:* What is the uniform policy, if any? What is considered acceptable attire for boys? For girls?
5. *Transportation System:* Where do the buses arrive and depart from? Does the student ride the bus? If she walks, where does she go when I enter the building?
6. *Classroom:* Where is his classroom? Who is his teacher? How do we contact the teacher? Where does he go if he changes classes throughout the day?
7. *New Friends:* Will the school connect the new student with a "buddy" or friend, ideally someone who speaks the same language?
8. *Bathrooms:* Where is the bathroom? How does the student communicate that she needs to leave the class?

The school orientation and tour can alleviate some fears about the new school environment and culture, for both students and parents.

For an overview of about the U.S. Education System for Refugees, see [CORE](#).

## 2. School-Based Support

The school registration is the most tangible step in the enrollment process, but the success of the student and family depends on the degree of support in the coming months and years. The school system in the United States depends on a high level of parental and familial involvement, which is often different than what refugee families are used to.

**Potential Obstacles:** Parents/guardians may face some or all of the following obstacles to staying engaged in their child's education.

1. **Conflicting Commitments:** As parents juggle new employment, English classes, and other time-sensitive appointments, it is sometimes difficult to stay up-to-date with the happenings at their child's school.
2. **Lack of Cultural Understanding:** Some parents do not realize that they need to be so involved in their child's schooling; in many countries, the teacher is almost exclusively responsible for the academic education of the child.
3. **Lack of English Comprehension:** Many parents are not literate in English or even their home language, and find it difficult to engage with their child's school (from homework help to understanding a permission slip, there may be a general lack of comprehension).
4. **Absence of Transportation:** It is difficult for a child to get extra help afterschool, or the parent to attend back-to-school night, without reliable transportation. Many children rely on a bus, which departs and arrives at specific times.
5. **Financial Constraints:** Many newly arrived families need to manage a very tight budget, and cannot always afford school uniforms, supplies, at-home activities, or field trips.

As much as possible, work with families to understand and overcome these obstacles. The parent is ultimately in charge of their child, not the school and not volunteers; it is up to them to understand, encourage, and motivate the child for success. Your role is to empower the family to empower the youth.

## **2a) Encourage Parental Involvement**

After identifying and problem-solving barriers to parental involvement at the school level, encourage the family to get involved in any way possible. Always try to facilitate communication directly between the school and family; volunteers should not speak or act on behalf of the family without express permission and request from the family. These are a few important topics and events that parents should be aware of:

**Parent Teacher Conferences:** Conferences can be incredibly beneficial to help the parent understand what their child is doing at school on a day-to-day basis. Any interaction between parents and teachers is highly encouraged, and helps bridge the disconnect between home life and school life. The school should be able to provide an in-person interpreter for a parent teacher conference, which would need to be arranged ahead of time. If the parent is not able to travel to the school to meet in person, or is busy during the suggested conference time, an extended phone call might be a good alternative. Facilitate the connections between parents and teachers, whether that means driving the parents to the school for a conference, or ensuring that a phone call has been set up with an interpreter.



**Report Cards:** Ask the family if they need help understanding report cards and the importance of tracking a child's progress. Report cards in the U.S. are oftentimes cryptic and confusing, and deviate from the standard point or percentage systems that are used in many other countries. Sit down with the refugee parents and go through the different information included on the report card, so that in the future, they are able to understand their children's progress at school.

*Note: Educators can sometimes misinterpret a lack of parental communication with the school as a lack of care, when it may be due to another reason entirely. Try to build bridges and find common ground: work with the school to understand the home environment and how they can best engage with refugee families, while empowering and informing the family of ways that they can get involved. Parents care about their child's education, but may not know how to express it.*

**Homework Assignments:** Due to the emphasis on diversified curriculum that utilizes a variety of instructional methods, homework assignments across grade levels can be confusing for parents. Sometimes the assignment is highly dependent on something taught in class that the parent is not familiar with. Homework can take the form of daily reading logs, building models or creating posters, completing worksheets, writing a story, finding items outside to use in art class, etc. Support parents in understanding these various assignments and empower them to always encourage their children to attempt the homework, even if they cannot complete all of it.

**Selection of Classes (for High School students):** If a child is over the traditional age for high school, they may need to take accelerated classes in order to complete the required curriculum in the state-mandated time frame. Some parents and students may be confused that they cannot select their classes in the same manner as their native-born peers; the parents should speak with a guidance counselor about their concerns. There may be a justifiable reason that they are taking core classes instead of electives. Encourage refugee parents and high school students to talk to the guidance department if there is any confusion over their class schedule.

**IEP Process Engagement:** For parents with children living with disabilities, input and advocacy within the school system will be an ongoing process. Encourage the parents to attend all IEP meetings with the IEP team. This process can be time consuming, frustrating, and difficult for parents, and having an ally can go a long way. You may accompany them at their request. Your support can mean a lot to a family.

## **2b) College Preparedness**

Many refugee students have dreamed of attending a college program in the United States, and many parents express that they want nothing more than their son or daughter to obtain a university degree. Work with the family or other college-readiness programs in your community to create conversation around higher education, empower refugee families to apply, and support them through the application and matriculation process. Universities are attainable, but require long-term planning, encouragement, and hard work from the family and service providers to overcome financial, cultural, and educational barriers.

**Financial:** Colleges and universities are very costly, especially for families that are trying to regain stability and start new lives in the United States. Many students will start at a community college and

then continue their studies at a four-year university. Others are eligible for need-based or talent-based scholarships, and all refugees are eligible for FAFSA. Creative solutions and extended conversation with the family are required throughout the process.

**Cultural:** The college application process is precise, demanding, and difficult to navigate if you are not familiar with the culture of higher education in the United States. Many refugee students require mentorship and guidance to understand the process of standardized testing, college essays, financial aid, admissions timelines, transcript submissions, and online applications. As you discuss college, introduce different themes in your conversations to start building vocabulary and awareness around the process.

**Educational:** While some students arrive in the United States with English proficiency, many need to take years of classes to catch up to the native-born peers. Consider colleges that have ESL programs for students or feature support services for international students, if they are needed. The English language used in academic settings is different than what students learn in grade school or in conversation, and students might need additional interventions once they begin a college program. Many universities require that non-native English speakers take a TOEFL test for admission to demonstrate proficiency.

Despite these potential barriers, refugee students are persevering and finding ways to access higher education, such as this: [Success story in Roanoke](#).

### 3. Understand Community Resources

As the family becomes more acclimated to their new homes, youth will begin to adjust and fall into a routine with their school and friends. However, youth are one of the key participants in community integration for their entire family. Additional supports may be available in your community to facilitate integration and academic, social and professional success. Here are some ideas to explore with the family:

**School-Based after School Programs:** After-school engagement can support the child with social, academic, and cultural integration into the school environment. Some afterschool programming may seem daunting to attend alone; try to gauge if there's a friend already involved in the program, or a club/activity that aligns with the child's interest. Sports can be particularly great for kids who don't have strong English skills, as shown in [Soccer Without Borders](#), which engages refugee youth in Baltimore.

**Mentorship Programs:** The education committee should match refugee children and teenagers with mentors through local mentorship organizations or through their schools. The mentor can help with homework and classroom instruction, or support the family in exploring the community. Family members can make connections with new people and get to know their neighborhood.

**Parenting Support Groups:** Some cities have parenting support groups. Participation will depend on a certain English level of the parent, but can be very beneficial in helping families navigate the new

American system. Parenting support groups are particularly important if the family faces an especially salient issue, such as a child living with a disability or a teenage child who is acting out.

**Libraries, Parks, Museums:** There are many vibrant and free resources in any community that can enhance the ongoing education of refugee youth and the whole family. See which institutions are easily accessible by the family and how they can get involved.

**Summer Camps:** Through summer programming, refugee youth can make valuable strides in their education during the summer months instead of spending the 2 months at home. Continuing their social and academic education can give them a valuable step up for the start of the next school year in the fall.

**Youth Employment:** Refugee youth can help contribute to the family's income and gain important work experience with an afterschool or summer job. Check with the family to see how they feel about their teenage daughter(s) or son(s) working a summer or part-time job.

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The education system in the United States is an essential part of the American dream, and many refugee parents want nothing more than for their children to be educated in the United States and have a successful future career. It is the hope of HIAS NY that volunteers can go beyond the activities listed here to think creatively about welcome and how it ties into the Education Pathway. If there are any questions about these or other materials, please do not hesitate to contact HIAS NY staff.

## **Education Pathway for Adults: Volunteer Guide**

## 1. ESL Programs

*HIAS NY is ultimately responsible for the provision of all required Reception and Placement (R&P) Services. Members of the education committee will undergo HIAS NY's education training and will coordinate regularly with HIAS NY staff.*

One of the most beneficial and important programs for refugee adults is English as a Second Language, or ESL. Refugees will use English in many areas of their lives, from the workplace, to riding the bus, to taking their citizenship test. With proficiency in English, refugees can access better employment and educational opportunities to achieve stability and upward mobility. Many communities offer free ESL programs for refugees and immigrants.

Research ESL programs that adults in the family can easily access. (Some programs may use a different acronym, such as “English as a New Language” or “ENL”). Many programs offer flexible class times that can be adapted to the refugee’s work schedule.

Specify details: When you visit, be sure to ask about the following:

1. Class times
2. Class levels
3. Enrollment processes and intake testing
4. Required documents
5. Transportation vouchers
6. Need for books or cost of any learning materials
7. Any tuition costs
8. Any additional benefits to registration in the program (e.g. attendance incentives)

With your assistance, HIAS NY staff will register each individual in an ESL class as appropriate. It may be difficult for them to independently navigate public transportation for the first time; try to find a buddy to assist them, or ride the bus to the ESL center with them. While in route try to explain the route, how to pay, transfer, and exit the bus. This is preferable to driving them, as they will need to navigate public transportation independently.

**Home-based Tutor:** Some adults may not be able to enroll in ESL classes due to age, location, or conflicting work schedules, but work with the refugee to try and find a program that suits their needs. If the barrier is unavoidable, formal ESL classes may not be an immediate possibility. An alternative option would be to connect the individual with an English-language tutor who can come to the house twice a week for individual lessons. This may be the best option for someone who is elderly or disabled, or in some cases for someone who is illiterate or pre-literate.

Reach out to HIAS NY staff and coordinate to identify an English tutor in your community that can volunteer with the individual who needs English support. Each refugee will have different linguistic needs, depending on their literacy level, previous exposure to English, and future goals.

## 2. Vocational Training and Workforce Development

For employable refugees, the immediate priority in the United States is to find a job and start earning income. Some refugees are able to use previous work experience or community connections to find a job quickly. However, for most refugees, continuing education or vocational training will be important as they transition from a preliminary entry-level job to future jobs. Refugees may need additional certifications or trainings to thrive in the U.S. workforce. Although vocational trades may not be in line with the refugee's long-term goals, they can provide stable, well-paying jobs within a relatively short amount of time. For many vocational trades, employees need to complete training or certification programs. Many of these programs are free to low-income participants.

**Community College Programs:** Research available training options at institutions of higher learning in your community. Many programs can be found at community colleges, but four-year institutions may also be a possibility. Most programs require a conversational ability in the English language. If the refugee does not have strong English skills, programs will be more limited. Sometimes, a program may be an option for a refugee after a few months of ESL classes.

Programs may include:

1. Certified Nursing Assistant
2. Hotel hospitality
3. Food preparation
4. Forklift training
5. Commercial driver's license
6. Landscaping
7. Security
8. Pharmacy Technician

Workforce development and vocational training programs usually offer a connection that can facilitate employment at the end of the course if the student proves their competency in the material. Identify if this is available when you research programs. Otherwise, inquire about all the other points listed above under "ESL Programs" and help facilitate enrollment.

**Job Corps:** Job Corps is a national career training program operated through the federal government for low-income residents ages 16-24. It is a full-time, campus based program that lasts up to two years and provides training in both hands-on trade skills and completion of a GED or high school diploma. The program is campus-based, and all students must live on a campus (locations and further details here: [Job Corps Centers](#)). All costs are covered, from books, to furniture, to food and lodging. See page 5 for a list of career technical training areas: [Job Corps brochure](#). Some sites have strong ESL programs to get students on track for their classes, but incoming students need to have at least a conversational English ability.

Job Corps can be a strong option for young adults who are ineligible for a traditional high school program. Job Corps is a rigorous program that requires independence, self-discipline, and ability to get along well with others, but can give students excellent skills that prepare them for adult life.



Students, and families of students, would need to see Job Corps as a long-term investment. While they will not accrue any costs during the 1-2-year program, they will not be earning any income either. This may not be a feasibility for families who need additional working adults to immediately contribute to the family's income. However, Job Corps graduates will have increased opportunities in the job market and be eligible for higher paying positions with an industry-recognized certificate. The family will need to make its own determination as to whether Job Corps makes sense or whether their child (age 16-24) should take another route such as getting a job right away or going to college.

### 3. Recertification Programs and Continuing Education

Many refugees arrive in the United States with robust employment histories as engineers, doctors, or educators, but are not able to immediately continue their careers upon arrival in the United States. This could be due to a lack of records (either unclear records, or diplomas and certificates that had to be left behind while fleeing), a lack of accepted credentials (unaccepted degrees from universities overseas, certifications that do not apply to the United States' system), or a lack of English (inability to communicate information, even if they are able to perform the job duties). These three options help refugees gain an advantage in the workforce and continue in their educational pursuits.

**Recertification:** Although immediate employment needs to be a priority, refugees can benefit from high salaries and career development if they are able to recertify their degree. Recertification, however, is a complex, expensive, and time consuming process with significant barriers. Read more here: ([Recertification from Another Country - Migration Policy Institute](#)). If the refugee is interested and financially capable of going through the process, it can be incredibly beneficial, but be careful not to make false promises to the refugee. For refugees with degrees from their home country, connect them with someone who can assist with the recertification process through a professional association or a relevant nonprofit. Organizations such as [Upwardly Global](#) and [Higher Advantage](#) support recertification of refugees and immigrants.

**Continuing Education:** This may be a more viable route if a refugee cannot recertify their degree. Some programs will accept expertise or partial credit from university transcripts or work histories, and the refugee does not need to completely restart their education from scratch. Programs vary considerably based on state and jurisdiction. Research available programs and assess what is needed to enroll. Will credits be accepted from overseas? What will transfer, and what needs to be taken again? How can someone qualify for financial aid? Talk to the refugee about available options and walk them through the process. Again, a mentor can be critical here. Explore resources within the university itself, including offices serving first generation college students.

**GED:** If the refugee does not have proof of a high school diploma, or did not complete high school in their home country, a HSE (or GED) program is a strong first step. The HSE or High School Equivalency (or GED, General Education Development), includes tests in four subject areas of math, science, social studies and language arts. A HSE serves as an equivalent to a high school diploma. Many community colleges offer HSE preparatory courses and some ESL classes for students with limited English to specifically target HSE skill sets. It is a difficult test that requires a high degree of work ethic, study time, and comprehension ability, but can open the door to increased opportunities and pay in the future.

Find out about local GED programs, talk to the refugee about his/her options, and if applicable, help them apply and get into the GED course. As the course continues, you can practice with the refugee or make sure he/she has the necessary resources to practice on their own. A GED tutor can be very helpful for the refugee to practice and reach competency for the GED tests.

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Adult education can bring increased independence, social mobility, and opportunity to the lives of New Americans. It is the hope of HIAS NY that volunteers can go beyond the activities listed here to think creatively about welcome and how it ties into the Education Pathway. If there are any questions about these or other materials, please do not hesitate to contact HIAS NY staff.

## **Employment Pathway: Volunteer Guide**

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## **Best Practices for all Volunteers**

### **1. Encourage Self-Sufficiency**

In any service, interaction, or appointment, always encourage self-sufficiency. It might feel helpful or be faster to do tasks *for* the refugee, but it is always better to do things *with* the refugee. Your efforts should educate and empower the refugee, not create dependency. It is alright and encouraged to draw healthy boundaries. She should learn how to do things independently so she can take control of her life, because volunteers will not be able to provide support indefinitely. Help establish a lifestyle for the refugee that can be maintained without your assistance after your volunteer service ends.

### **2. Understand Strengths**

Even though the refugee may have gone through many hardships, they are still the best person to make decisions that affect their lives. Be careful not to interpret a lack of English skill as a lack of experience or capability; these two characteristics are unrelated. Always try to think about refugees through a strength-based lens, instead of focusing on roadblocks or challenges. Create tangible goals with the refugee that tap into their strengths, and work towards their short-term goals and long-term dreams.

### **3. Ensure Comprehension**

As you interact with the refugees or witness other service providers interacting with refugees, pause and check for comprehension. Did they understand my question? Is the doctor using the right interpreter? Are they able to read this school registration packet? Did the insurance agent speak too quickly? Whenever possible and necessary, utilize trained interpreters who speak a language that the refugee is comfortable with. In certain situations, an interpreter is legally required to assist with interactions, such as medical settings, legal environments (with police) and with government-funded organizations (public schools). Comprehension can be verified by asking the refugee what they've understood from the conversation, offering an interpreter to assist, or asking follow-up questions.

### **4. Be Aware: Trauma-Informed Care**

Refugees come from a range of backgrounds and experiences. Not all refugees have experienced violent trauma as a product of war or violence, but all refugees have experienced some degree of trauma due to their displacement as refugees. It's important to be aware and sensitive to this, without being overly reactionary or presumptuous. Stress and anxiety due to trauma can manifest itself in many different ways. Perhaps the refugee is reluctant to trust you, after years of living in a volatile environment where she always had to be on guard. Maybe he is reluctant to become independent and exhibits low confidence, after being marginalized for so long. And sometimes, trauma can lead to depression, thoughts of suicide, or abuse. If you are concerned about a particular individual, speak to staff at HIAS NY. Read an overview of trauma-informed care here: [SAMHSA](#) and about the "Bag of Rocks" Metaphor here: [Refugee Health TA](#).

### **5. Advocate for the Refugee When Appropriate**

As you support the refugees in their everyday lives, speak up when you think they need an extra person on their team. For example, if you go to the doctor's office for an appointment, and the Arabic interpreter that was promised over the phone is not present, politely approach someone about the issue. They cannot start the appointment without an interpreter and the refugee has a right to timely, comprehensive care. If you think someone has treated the refugee unfairly, take note of the issue and

Speak with a staff member at HIAS NY about your concerns. It may be necessary to document the concern or make a complaint.

#### 6. Find Balance Between Cultural Environments

Refugees come from a variety of cultures, traditions, legal systems, family structures, and living conditions that may conflict with their new environment in the United States. Sometimes families need to make considerable modifications to their ways of life in new and unexpected ways. It is important to respect their culture and tradition, while still ensuring that they understand their new environment and the set of standards that they must adhere to: laws, leases, contracts, bill payments, child protections, and safety.

#### 7. Manage Expectations

Both you and the refugee will approach the next year of resettlement with a set of expectations. The refugee family has been trying to resettle in new country for years, and has come to view America as the answer to displacement. During this time, family members have heard about America from a variety of sources with varying degrees of reliability, and formed a set of hopes, expectations, and opinions about America before arriving. Likewise, you have also formed a set of opinions about refugees and the resettlement process, shaped by a similarly wide array of sources. Remember to meet the refugee where they are, and not expect a certain type of relationship with the family. Be patient with the family and approach your relationship with humility, openness, and understanding.

#### 8. Be Aware of Power Dynamics

Although the refugees should always be viewed as capable and independent, you are ultimately the guide and volunteer, and can accidentally fall into an unhealthy power dynamic with the refugee. Avoid situations where the refugee may feel compelled to do something outside of their comfort zone due to a need to please you or the other volunteers. For example, try not to put the refugee on the spot by asking her to speak about her country. Do not imply that he should attend certain social events if he is not genuinely interested. If the goal of the activity is to directly create further self-sufficiency and independence for the refugee, then it is important; if not, then approach the situation sensitively.

#### 9. Start Learning the Refugee's Language

As the refugees start to develop their English skills, you can also simultaneously start learning their language. There are many resources online that can teach how to say basic phrases in a variety of languages, from Swahili to Hakha Chin. Be sure to identify the dialect that the refugee speaks: for example, Arabic spoken in Syria is quite different from Arabic spoken in Morocco, and sometimes unintelligible. A few key phrases in a refugee's native language can go a long way in building trust and mutual respect.

#### *\*Recording your Volunteer Time and Donations*

*Throughout your time as a volunteer, it is important to keep records of everything you are donating, including hours, material goods, and driving mileage. HIAS NY may request this information, particularly for some programs (such as the Matching Grant employment program) You also may be able to receive personal tax deductions on some contributions.*



## 1. Job Acquisition

*HIAS NY is ultimately responsible for the provision of all Reception and Placement (R&P) Services. Members of the employment committee will undergo HIAS NY's employment training and will coordinate regularly with HIAS NY staff.*

Acquiring a job is a critical component of achieving stability as a recently arrived refugee and an important step in long-term economic success. Serving as a volunteer on the employment pathway requires a balancing of immediate needs (to pay rent, to buy food) and longer-term goals (to work as a nurse, to buy a car). These two degrees of priority are sometimes in conflict, and you will need to address both of them as you continue working with the refugee over the course of the year. It is important to stick to positive messaging and actively try to assess, frame, and manage refugee expectations. *For any family or individual, job acquisition is always the number one priority in the short-term.*

We guide you through a series of steps to understand the goals of the refugee and how to best prepare the refugee and the future employer with all the tools of success. There are four main components to job acquisition: a) HIAS NY works with the client(s) to develop a resettlement plan, b) housing pathway volunteers reach out to employers, c) HIAS NY staff and employment pathway volunteers prepare the refugee for employment, and d) secure employment. All of this information should be tailored to the educational level and employment background of the refugee, but it is important to at least consider and touch on all the following themes.

*Note: Despite the refugee's qualifications and experience, it is likely that their first job will be in an entry-level position. He/she may feel discouraged, but it is an important step to building connections and resume experience in a new country. Once a first job is obtained, it is easier to look for other jobs that might be more ideal.*

### 1a) Develop a Resettlement Plan

The development of the resettlement plan is led by the HIAS NY case manager; consult with HIAS NY for more information.

*Note: Children in the family who are 18-21 sometimes need to choose between working full time and continuing their education. The family will ultimately make the decision, but they may consult HIAS NY staff or employment pathway volunteers for advice and to weigh the pros/cons of each decision. Education is important, but meeting the financial needs of the family is an immediate need and often takes precedence.*

The resettlement plan, which is completed with HIAS NY staff at the intake interview, empowers the refugee(s) to set goals and plan their first year starting a new life in the United States. All adults in the family should take ownership of the resettlement plan and include their own goals and plans for their future.

## 1b) Reach Out to Employers

Employer research and outreach should happen in concert with the next step: “preparing the refugee for employment.” It is advisable to understand the availability of jobs in the community and identify what skill sets are needed for which types of work; likewise, it is important to start thinking about what types of work would suit the refugee and which transferable skill sets he possesses. Does she speak English conversationally? Does he have experience with manual labor? Does she have a license and access to a car to get to work, or only the bus? Keep these things in mind as you start the job search.

*As you search for jobs with the refugee, think expansively. Here are a few tips:*

**Utilize Networks:** Start small. Who do you know within your community who might be hiring for an entry-level position? Do your friends or family members have any contact with other local employers? Think creatively: many companies have employees working at very different levels of the organization. For example, a university might not hire a newcomer with limited experience to work as a faculty member, but they might hire someone as a groundskeeper. A bank might not immediately hire a teller, but may need a security guard. Tapping into your network might be the best way to find resources and opportunities within the community.

The refugee can also tap into their networks to find work. Newly arrived refugees may have already contacted people within the community who speak the same language or who are from the same country. It is likely that these individuals are working, and could perhaps pave the way for their friend or contact to be hired as well.

**Reach Out to Employment Agencies:** There is likely at least one free employment agency within your community. Perhaps this employment agency serves other immigrants or low-income individuals, or simply runs an employment resource board on their website. Connect with these existing services and organizations that are doing similar work. Coordinate with other employment pathway volunteers, be they in your committee or in the employment collaborative, to streamline communication as needed.

*Note: It may seem immediately convenient to find “under the table” work for refugees—it might be faster, simpler, and require less work. However, it is important that the refugee start building a formal work history, paying taxes, and understanding labor laws of the country as a legal resident who is able to formally work upon arrival.*

**Look at Job Posting Sites:** Websites like Monster and Indeed might not lead directly to a job, but can provide new ideas to enhance your job search or give you leads on companies hiring locally. You might find opportunities to look into that you had not previously considered.

**Walk-In Applications:** Businesses near to a refugee’s home or easily accessed via public transportation may accept applications on a walk-in basis. This can also be good practice for the refugee in completing job applications. Walk with the refugee to ask if there are available positions in nearby businesses (e.g. grocery stores) or in nearby malls.

## 1c) Prepare Refugee for Employment

Preparing the refugee largely depends on the background and skill set of the individual. Was she a medical student in Damascus before arriving in the United States? Or was he a small-scale farmer in the Hama countryside? Was he a small business owner in Aleppo? Or was she a journalist and activist in Daraa? Regardless of the language ability, educational attainment, or professional background of the individual, it is important to consider the following areas as you prepare the refugee for the US workforce. More information and ideas on these topics can be found in Chapter 12 here: [Cultural Orientation Center](#) and the “Career” section here: [The Refugee Center](#). If there are adults in the family who are unable to work due to a severe disability, health issue, or caregiver responsibility, there are other options available as a source of income (such as SSI benefits from the government.)

**Employment ESL:** As a refugee prepares to enter the workforce, she should practice ESL related to the workplace to gain confidence and practice, for example: a strong introduction, calling in sick or late, and key words in a typical workplace (restroom, paycheck, break, full-time, part-time, insurance, etc.). This can get the refugee in the mindset of work and help them feel empowered when they attain employment.

**Resume:** Writing the resume is as much an exercise in understanding the skill sets and backgrounds of the refugee as it is a tool in employment. You may need to take an unconventional approach to resume writing for some refugees who have limited professional work experience. Focus on skills and experiences as much as formal employment. If the refugee has a physical or intellectual disability, but is still able to work, seek out a service agency in the community who can assist with specialized employment and learn about the refugee’s rights here: [Americans with Disabilities Act](#). If a refugee with a disability is receiving SSI, but would like to work, contact the [Ticket to Work](#) for free employment assistance nationwide.

If the new arrival spent time in a refugee camp, they may have incredibly relevant skill sets within the informal economy, but no pay stubs, employment records, or testimonies to prove it. Always approach the refugee and situation with a strengths-based perspective. Additionally, jobs can look very different in different regions of the world; go into the conversations with no assumptions about a refugee’s previous experience.

\*Work with an interpreter and ask the following questions:

- *(Start general) What kinds of jobs have you had in your life? What is your most recent job?*
- *(If there isn’t much of a response) What did you do with your time? Did you produce goods for your family or community?*
- *(Think outside the box, particularly for women who have not held formal employment): Did you take care of children? Did you help with farm tasks or sewing clothing?*
- *Were you responsible for a particular task within your community or neighborhood? What were you responsible for in your family?*
- *Did you ever go to a training program to learn a skill?*
- *What are you good at? Did people come to you with certain requests in the community?*
- *What level of school did you finish? What were your classes about? Do you have a degree?*

- (To narrow down specific skills) At \_\_\_\_ job, what did you do with your time? How many hours did you work? What were your responsibilities?
- What were you good at in that job? How many years did you stay at that job?
- (If employment history is limited) Did you want to work? If so, why couldn't you work?
- When you stopped working at \_\_\_\_ job, what was the reason you left?
- Whom can you use as a reference? (should be someone who speaks English)

*Note: Because refugees may have experienced trauma, many dates and times are impossible to recall. However, dates are important to new employers who want a full picture of work history. If a refugee cannot remember a date, you can ask: how old were you when you started the job? Was your child born? And so on. Then, utilize the refugee's birthdate to get a rough sense of employment duration and timeline.*

Write the resume with the refugee to highlight the strengths of the refugee and search for experiences within their histories that portray them as resilient, adaptable, and hardworking. Use action verbs and specific language, and try to assign a job title to the work even if they worked in an informal capacity. For example, if a refugee spent 10 hours per week organizing youth soccer tournaments in the camp, dig a bit deeper. Did he act as a coach? Did he mentor the kids? Counsel them? Provide team development? Organize matches? Resolve conflicts? Recruit players? Request soccer gear from NGOs? Perhaps the refugee

will not immediately share all the components of the role, but with a bit of follow up and well-phrased questions, you can usually uncover many in-demand skills. As much as possible, try to build the resume with the refugee and explain the process of writing a resume. When a refugee attains their first (and second etc.) job, work with them to adapt their resume, to emphasize that the resume needs to be a living document.

**Money Literacy:** Some refugees may have a very rudimentary understanding of money. Go over a few basics – what are the different denominations of currency? Practice differentiating coins or giving change. Perhaps go to a grocery store and practice counting out the change of different price tags, or guessing the value of different products to teach the value of the U.S. dollar.

**Financial Literacy:** Financial literacy is a key component of cultural orientation and is essential to economic integration and self-sufficiency. Topics are listed below, although the speed at which these topics should be introduced and the depth needs to be tailored to the refugee.

- Bank account (purpose, FDIC insured, deposit, withdrawal)
- Basic budgeting
- Debit cards vs. credit cards
- Direct deposit
- Checks (writing checks, deposits)
- Money orders (until a refugee has a bank account, he/she will have to pay bills with a money order)
- Online banking
- Taxes

*Note: Refugees borrow money from the International Organization of Migration to pay for their flight to the USA. They should start paying their loan in small installments within their first six months in the United States – this is the first opportunity to develop a good credit score.*

- Credit and credit histories

A good resource for financial literacy lessons can be found in the [CORE Budgeting and Personal finance curriculum](#) (including supplemental materials in [Arabic](#)). Other resources include [FDIC Money Smart](#), [ORR, Banking on the Future](#) and [mymoney.gov](#). Learning financial literacy is a long and sustained process and will take patience and time. However, it is one of the most important skills that American guides can share with refugees. Pairing a family with a financial mentor who will help with budgeting, savings, and money management long-term is an excellent way to make sure refugees take control of their finances throughout the first few years in America.

**Interview Skills:** Regardless of the professional background, a newly arrived refugee will probably need some degree of orientation towards interviewing in the United States. Some themes to highlight can be found here: [Lutheran Family Services](#). Other varied employment resources can be found here: [Higher Advantage](#). Some things may seem obvious to you, but are rather particular to United States culture and might not be considered important in a different cultural context.

\*Focus on:

*Body language: Posture, handshakes, eye contact, importance of smiling*

*Dress: Appropriate/inappropriate, type of shoes*

*Hygiene: Hair, facial hair, cleanliness, body odor*

*Speaking: Volume of voice, what is polite/impolite, clear speaking*

*Confidence: Awareness of what is on their resume, how to answer questions*

Rely on role playing and conduct a mock interview (with an interpreter, if necessary) to convey most of your points. Prepare questions ahead of time and practice going through the interview, from entrance into the room to exit, with the refugee. Serve as the interviewer first; if the refugee is up to it, let her act as the interviewer too. Answer questions in a variety of ways and follow up with: "Was that a good answer? Why or why not?"

**Employment Laws:** All refugees are eligible to work upon arrival to the United States (see here: [Department of Justice](#)). Additionally, the U.S. has clear employment laws that are not always the same as those in other countries. You can find a summary of key laws here: [Labor Laws](#) and your [Rights at Work](#). Explain the basics of overtime (must be paid 1.5x salary in certain situations), safe workplaces (uniform requirements such as steel-toed boots, worker's compensation), age requirements (youth employment laws) and non-discrimination (on the basis of age, gender, religion, ethnicity, etc.). Unions are non-profit organizations that exist for all workers to improve the benefits and treatment at their jobs. Teach the refugee about tracking paystubs and checking for accuracies (sample paystubs can be found on [Stub Samples](#)). Explain the core principals of what is listed their paystubs, including net pay, gross pay, taxes, insurance, social security deductions. Connect this lesson back to basic budgeting and long-term planning.

*Note: Despite the capacities of the refugee, sometimes it's important in the beginning to take responsibility for an employer's relationship with a refugee. Ensure that the employer does not get stood up for an interview. Getting things started smoothly goes a very long way.*

**Guidelines to Being an Employee:** Ultimately, the refugee needs to understand that it is crucial to obtain and maintain their first job until they can find something that may suit them better. State benefits are finite resources, and employment is the only viable option to pay bills and keep a good standard of life. Many refugees are surprised at the high number of bills that they are responsible for in the United States; some refugees came from camps where they were not responsible for paying for rent, utilities or food. Explain that it is always easier to get a second job after staying in a first job for six months or more, and that it is important to find a new job before quitting your first job. However, if someone is not happy at their job or wants to improve a condition of the work, they have a right to tell their managers. If two or more people speak to the manager together, they are exercising their right to concerted activity for collective bargaining and any kind of retaliation on the part of the company is illegal and carries penalties. See [Workplace Fairness](#) for more information.

Teach the new arrival these key principles that are central to employment in the United States. A good employee....

- ...arrives at work a bit before the start of a shift*
- Is responsible for showing up on time, despite weather or transportation delays*
- Goes to work for every assigned shift*
- Does not send a friend or neighbor to work a shift in his/her stead*
- Knows the name of his/her manager and location/address of employment*
- Requests permission to be absent from work if he/she is sick or has a crucial appointment*
- Does not use a cell phone during the work day*
- Works with other employees at the company, even if they don't speak the same language*

### **1d) Secure Refugee Employment**

As HIAS NY staff, employment pathway volunteers, and the refugee find viable job opportunities, start supporting the refugee with the application and interview process. Try to reinforce interview skills before each interview during the bus or car ride over to the interview location. Keep track of pending applications and set a date for the refugee to follow up on their application. Always encourage refugee clients to send a thank you email to an employer after an interview, or send a note. It is common that an employer never calls back about an application, so be proactive in reaching out 5-7 days after an interview.

*Note: Refugees will learn that receiving employment income will lower or discontinue their monthly state benefits (like TANF) and may hear that it is better to \*not\* work from others in the community. They may hear other rumors as well; that a job is bad even before attending an interview, or that a friend is making more money across town. While there may be truth to these points, remember to stress the importance of finding ANY job (within their capabilities) to start working. It's temporary. And it's the best step towards long-term self-sufficiency. Speak to HIAS NY staff for further guidance.*

Once the refugee is offered a job, congratulations are in order! Now, it is your role to support the refugee in *maintaining* the job. Sometimes this may be the hardest part, due to other time commitments, low satisfaction with the work, or a lack of understanding of the job requirements. Make sure that they have all the required materials for the job, including specific clothing, work boots, etc. Remain encouraging and supportive as they continue in their work. Consistently stress that it is very



important to not quit the job before consultation with HIAS NY staff and an employment volunteer, as it is always easier to fix a problem in the current job than to find a new job. Unfortunately, not all employers are looking out for the best interests of employees so be prepared to help advocate for the person who is a refugee, especially around scheduling, treatment and benefits of the job. Employers are also benefiting from the work of refugees.

For many refugees who were high-paid professionals in their home countries, entry-level positions may be frustrating and discouraging. It is understandably difficult to go from a civil engineer in the government to a vegetable-slicer in a warehouse; again, remind refugees that this work is temporary as they regain financial stability in the United States and a step in the right direction. Likewise, some individuals may want to attend school first (either ESL classes or continuing education), and then work after a few months (even though their English is likely to improve the fastest if they are using it every day at work!). Try to balance the two schedules (fixed work schedules are ideal so people can continue their education), and if it is not possible, it is almost always necessary for the refugee to prioritize work in the short term.

*\*\*Note: If you are working with a family, you can also investigate part-time or summer employment opportunities for teenage children. Read about laws governing employment of minors in your state and area. Youth employment can greatly benefit the family, and add a valuable source of additional income to encourage independence and self-sufficiency. Youth can also develop skill sets and a sense of self-confidence through meaningful employment. On the other hand, it is important that you speak with the family about balancing youth employment and youth education. In some families, children are forced to bear the brunt of household and financial responsibilities and abandon their education; it is important you keep this on your radar and bring up any concerns to the family's case manager. Always keep HIAS NY staff informed of any issues that might arise within the family or in the workplace for employed teenagers.*

## 2. Financial Education

After obtaining and maintaining a first job, there is still much to learn for a new refugee in order to truly thrive economically and pave the way for long-term growth and investment. Here, we discuss a few components that should be discussed and taught once the refugee has a fundamental understanding of employment and has secured a first job: a) conduct post-employment training, b) open a bank account, c) conduct financial literacy training, d) revisit resettlement plan, e) secure a professional mentor, and f) research job training opportunities and recertification.

### 2a) Conduct Post-Employment Job Training



Try to check up on the new employee as needed and as much as the refugee wants. After the first day, gauge their reactions to the job and work environment. What was exciting? What was difficult? Did you understand your boss and co-workers? What other support do you need? How was the transportation to and from the job? After one week, check in again. After the second week, the refugee should be feeling a bit more settled. Talk through any remaining issues they might have and stay updated on their employment experience.

*Note: Some refugees might want to talk frequently and ask advice, whereas other may misconstrue this as intrusive or as a lack of confidence in their ability. Please be mindful of this and respect their wishes.*

At some point within this first month of employment, or whenever the refugee receives their first paycheck, set up a time to meet (with an interpreter, if necessary) to reintroduce the following topics. More information and ideas can be found in chapter 9 here: [Cultural Orientation Center](#).

**How to Call in Sick/Report an Injury:** Talk about general workplace policies with the refugee, particularly if they have limited work experience or English skills. How is she supposed to call out sick or report an injury? What if he needs to miss work next week for a critical doctor's appointment? Go over the relevant phone numbers and procedures with the refugee.

**How to Read a Paycheck:** Check with the refugee to see if he or she is comfortable discussing this. If not, do not press the subject but rather consult HIAS NY staff, who will conduct any orientation if needed. It should be reiterated that refugees should not show their checks to anyone unless they fully trust the individual and are comfortable doing so, as these checks contain personal information such as social security numbers in addition to their salary or wage. There is a lot of information on a paycheck that can be confusing or misleading. If requested, HIAS NY staff or a trusted volunteer may sit with a refugee and go over each item on the paycheck and what it means. Encourage them to check their paystubs for accuracy and keep them in a safe place at home.

**Taxes:** Explain the concept of taxes and what sorts of services are paid for by taxes. It is illegal in the United States to only work for cash and not pay a percentage to the government. Taxes are usually deducted from paychecks each month, but all U.S. residents (including refugees) also need to file taxes before April 15 each year. Refer them to a [local, free tax preparation service](#) that is trusted in the community and remind them during tax season that they need to file. Discourage refugees from going to fee-based tax preparation programs (they usually have heavy advertising and flashy commercials), and when tax season arrives, help them make an appointment at the preferred (free, state-sponsored) tax preparation agency.

**Reporting Income to DSS:** Newly arrived refugees are typically enrolled in cash and/or food assistance through the Department of Social Services. Once a refugee obtains work, they will need to report this information to DSS, usually within 30 days. Their benefits will then decrease based on their new income. Many refugees are reluctant to report income to the DSS because benefits will decrease however, eventually the DSS will match the Social Security number of the refugee in their system to the payroll tax system and the new arrival will get into trouble with the government. If this occurs, they will potentially have to repay benefits. Encourage them to be open and honest, and paint this new

development as a serious step toward self-sufficiency. Reiterate that fraud is not tolerated in the U.S. and may result in fines, prosecution, prison time, and even removal from the United States.

## **2b) Open a Bank Account**

As soon as the refugee has received all the necessary documentation, they will need guidance in opening a bank account. Support the refugee in choosing a bank that is convenient for them, with a branch close to their home address. Having a bank account is an easy and safe way to store money. See additional benefits here: [Westchester Co: Bank Account Benefits](#). In some countries, bank accounts are not always safe or protected by the government, and many people operate exclusively in cash. Explain the benefits of a bank account to the refugee.

*Note: Some refugees may have different requirements when choosing a financial institution, such as a bank that complies with Islamic finance law. Be aware of this during financial discussions and orientations with the refugee and try to research local options.*

Prepare the necessary documents and give the refugee a bank “orientation.” What is the ATM and how does it work? What is a PIN and why is it important? What does the teller do? How do you get money? Deposit money? How do you find out how much money is in your account? What is a check? How do you write a check (for rent, for example)? What are the bank hours? If the refugee is able to use a computer or smart phone, you can also demonstrate online banking.

## **2c) Conduct Financial Literacy Training**

For financial and savings literacy programming, look for curriculum resources that suit your specific audience. Understand the refugee’s level of financial literacy comprehension, and adapt a learning program that suites their needs. You can get ideas from here: [National Education Association](#). This is primarily a resource for school-aged children, but some programming can be used for refugees with limited previous knowledge or financial awareness. Another good source to read is published by Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, and can be found here: [LIRS](#). The Office of Refugee Resettlement also compiles resources and curriculums for financial literacy: [ORR](#).

## **2d) Revisit Resettlement Plan**

The resettlement plan should be consistently referenced and updated as the financial situation of the family develops over time. HIAS NY staff and the refugee(s) will prepare the first budget after about two months in the county. After employment, HIAS NY staff will sit down with the refugee and if needed an interpreter again to make any necessary updates together. HIAS NY staff will take a look at the budget and analyze if the family’s needs are being met. How does the budget change with this new job? How will the family fill any remaining gaps? What are the long-term goals of the family (a particular job? Further education? Purchasing a car? Purchasing a home)? What are the milestones along the way for the family to reach these long-term goals?

## **2e) Secure a Professional Mentor**

HIAS NY staff will work with the family to identify long-term employment goals of the adults in the family. Volunteers should identify a person to serve as an employment mentor for the family or individual from their social or professional network or the field in which the individual wants to work. There may also be a professional organization that can provide a mentor, or an ethnic association that can be a resource. If the working adult/s came from a particular professional field, try to match them with someone in the same field. The mentor should support the refugee in their professional goals, whether that is recertification, continuing education, professional development, or switching career paths. It is ideal if this individual is willing to foster a relationship long-term, but also helpful to have an informational interview or offer guidance on occasion.

## **2f) Research Job Training Opportunities and Recertification**

**Training:** While most refugees need to start a job as soon as possible, whether or not it is in their field of interest, a vocational training program can quickly give them a specialized skill set and increased salary. Many community colleges offer free job training programs with a variety of certifications in fields like forklift operator, certified nursing assistant, or HVAC. These programs are usually fast-paced and demanding, and require a working knowledge of English. Explore programs at local community colleges and employment development centers, and ask about how to qualify for free or reduced tuition. These programs can give a refugee with limited skill sets or certifications a quick career boost.

**Recertification, Continuing Education:** Though there will be refugees who come to America with little job experience, there will also be refugees with extensive professional backgrounds in their home countries who will wish to continue their work in their field of expertise. Many local employment agencies will offer assistance with connecting refugees to jobs that build on their prior experience. However, it is common that many U.S. employers will not accept experience or references from overseas, especially in professions such as medicine or law.

Encourage the refugee to seek out programs in local community colleges or universities that will offer opportunities to earn credentials in the refugee's field of prior experience. Tell them that the recertification process takes time, and that in the meantime, they should continue to focus on building a resume and gaining references with other work in the U.S., even if it isn't their ideal job. Remind them that their first job in the U.S. will not be their only job, and that they will be able to move up with time and patience. Look at the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services to see if there is a member organization in your area that can assist with evaluation the refugee's foreign credentials and read recertification guides here: [Higher Advantage](#).

## **3. Economic Development**

### **3a) Continue Professional Growth**

As refugees attain their first job and begin to focus on their longer-term goals, urgent needs may decrease, but it is an ideal time to foster long-term planning and professional growth. There are several ways to continue to engage with the refugee throughout the rest of the year and into the future.

**Check in on Long-Term Goals:** After the first 90 days, the host organization will take on more and more responsibility as needed. This is a perfect opportunity to reevaluate the refugee's networks and how their economic opportunities could be enhanced. Consistently try to be creative and approach problems with solutions and ideas. Volunteers often know more about the U.S. landscape than refugees in the first year in the United States. Refugees may not know how to utilize online research to find opportunities that fit their needs or wants. For example, is there a car donation program? Is there a carpooling resource that can help them save on their budget?

**Introduce Technology:** Once a refugee becomes more settled and develops a routine, there may be opportunities to incorporate technology or computer literacy training into their routine. Increasingly, technology is a bridge to new employment, housing, and financial security. Gauge the family's computer literacy and encourage them to go to the next level. This may include:

- Computer literacy classes at a local library, school, employment or community center, or community college.
- Computer programming classes or other advanced classes at a local training center.
- Apps that may assist the family. For example: mapping and transportation apps, Google translate, budget tracking apps, banking apps, note-taking, housing apps, and employment apps.
- Transition to online banking (being sure to train on keeping accounts secure).

While increasing technological literacy for refugees is an excellent step toward integration, there are increasing security threats from use of online platforms. Be sure to warn and train refugees on keeping their personal information secure. In particular, never share a social security number over the internet. Online and telephone scams are also rampant, particularly for immigrants in the United States.

**Access Long-Term Employment Assistance:** Locate a local [American Job Center](#), required to assist underserved populations with job search and placement. This can serve as a permanent resource for the refugee household as engagement with volunteers may wane. Assist the refugee to locate the center and have an intake appointment if they are open. Otherwise, ensure they know about the center, the services, and can access it independently. This center can help with those that have a job and are looking to upgrade or for a change.

### **3b) Develop Assets and Long-Term Goals**

Refugees may be particularly interested in the long-term goals listed below. It is important to connect them to agencies and experts that can guide them to achieve their goals in the United States. Long-term educational goals are covered in the Education Pathway.

**Home Buying:** Many refugees plan to buy homes in the United States, leading to revitalized and vibrant communities (see study here: [WE Global Network](#)). In fact, some refugee groups 10 years after arriving in the United States have a higher home ownership rate than U.S.-born households.<sup>1</sup> Refugees

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<sup>1</sup> "Refugee Integration in the United States," Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2016/06/16/139551/refugee-integration-in-the-united-states/>

will need to plan to save money from their job, establish a good credit score through replaying their IOM loan or a credit building loan, and understand the steps to buying a house in the United States. There are sometimes tax incentives or credits for first-time home buyers. Find a free home buying class in the refugees' neighborhood that they can attend. Learn about home buying on [HUD's website](#), as well as [locate a housing counseling agency](#) near to the refugee's home. Alternatively, find free online resources, such as this one from [United Guarantee](#), the refugee can study at home before they commit to a home ownership class. Many tax incentive or home buying credit programs require individuals complete a formal course, and it is particularly recommended for refugee home buyers.

**Starting a Small Business:** Refugees are known as an entrepreneurial population, and many have aspirations of starting a small business. Read a report on immigrant-owned businesses in New York State here: [NYC "Unlocking Potential" Report](#). With adequate planning and capital, this is possible and refugees can be quite successful. There are excellent resources online, such as [Dream Builder](#) that trains immigrant entrepreneurs on creating a business plan and how to prepare to own a business or [Immigrant Biz](#), that publishes stories and resources for immigrant entrepreneurs. There are also local microcredit institutions or business training centers that can assist refugees throughout this process. Being connected to business planning resources is essential. Try to find a local business student or professional interested in helping a refugee through a business plan or throughout business development.

**Purchasing a Vehicle or Savings for Other Goals:** Banks or credit unions sometimes have opportunities for matched savings programs. Contact local immigrant assistance organizations or financial institutions to research local opportunities. In particular, research [Individualized Development Accounts](#) that may be accessed in your area.

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For all refugee families, achieving financial stability, career satisfaction, and economic independence is a critical step as they start their lives as New Americans. It is the hope of HIAS NY that volunteers can go beyond the activities listed here to think creatively about welcome and how it ties into the Employment Pathway. If there are any questions about these or other materials, please do not hesitate to contact HIAS NY staff.



Welcome the stranger.  
Protect the refugee.

## **Community Connections Pathway: Volunteer Guide**

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## **Best Practices for all Volunteers**

### **1. Encourage Self-Sufficiency**

In any service, interaction, or appointment, always encourage self-sufficiency. It might feel helpful or be faster to do tasks *for* the refugee, but it is always better to do things *with* the refugee. Your efforts should educate and empower the refugee, not create dependency. It is alright and encouraged to draw healthy boundaries. She should learn how to do things independently so she can take control of her life, because volunteers will not be able to provide support indefinitely. Help establish a lifestyle for the refugee that can be maintained without your assistance after your volunteer service ends.

### **2. Understand Strengths**

Even though the refugee may have gone through many hardships, they are still the best person to make decisions that affect their lives. Be careful not to interpret a lack of English skill as a lack of experience or capability; these two characteristics are unrelated. Always try to think about refugees through a strength-based lens, instead of focusing on roadblocks or challenges. Create tangible goals with the refugee that tap into their strengths, and work towards their short-term goals and long-term dreams.

### **3. Ensure Comprehension**

As you interact with the refugees or witness other service providers interacting with refugees, pause and check for comprehension. Did they understand my question? Is the doctor using the right interpreter? Are they able to read this school registration packet? Did the insurance agent speak too quickly? Whenever possible and necessary, utilize trained interpreters who speak a language that the refugee is comfortable with. In certain situations, an interpreter is legally required to assist with interactions, such as medical settings, legal environments (with police) and with government-funded organizations (public schools). Comprehension can be verified by asking the refugee what they've understood from the conversation, offering an interpreter to assist, or asking follow-up questions.

### **4. Be Aware: Trauma-Informed Care**

Refugees come from a range of backgrounds and experiences. Not all refugees have experienced violent trauma as a product of war or violence, but all refugees have experienced some degree of trauma due to their displacement as refugees. It's important to be aware and sensitive to this, without being overly reactionary or presumptuous. Stress and anxiety due to trauma can manifest itself in many different ways. Perhaps the refugee is reluctant to trust you, after years of living in a volatile environment where she always had to be on guard. Maybe he is reluctant to become independent and exhibits low confidence, after being marginalized for so long. And sometimes, trauma can lead to depression, thoughts of suicide, or abuse. If you are concerned about a particular individual, speak to staff at HIAS NY. Read an overview of trauma-informed care here: [SAMHSA](#) and about the "Bag of Rocks" Metaphor here: [Refugee Health TA](#).

### **5. Advocate for the Refugee When Appropriate**

As you support the refugees in their everyday lives, speak up when you think they need an extra person on their team. For example, if you go to the doctor's office for an appointment, and the Arabic interpreter that was promised over the phone is not present, politely approach someone about the issue. They cannot start the appointment without an interpreter and the refugee has a right to timely, comprehensive care. If you think someone has treated the refugee unfairly, take note of the issue and

Speak with a staff member at HIAS NY about your concerns. It may be necessary to document the concern or make a complaint.

#### 6. Find Balance Between Cultural Environments

Refugees come from a variety of cultures, traditions, legal systems, family structures, and living conditions that may conflict with their new environment in the United States. Sometimes families need to make considerable modifications to their ways of life in new and unexpected ways. It is important to respect their culture and tradition, while still ensuring that they understand their new environment and the set of standards that they must adhere to: laws, leases, contracts, bill payments, child protections, and safety.

#### 7. Manage Expectations

Both you and the refugee will approach the next year of resettlement with a set of expectations. The refugee family has been trying to resettle in new country for years, and has come to view America as the answer to displacement. During this time, family members have heard about America from a variety of sources with varying degrees of reliability, and formed a set of hopes, expectations, and opinions about America before arriving. Likewise, you have also formed a set of opinions about refugees and the resettlement process, shaped by a similarly wide array of sources. Remember to meet the refugee where they are, and not expect a certain type of relationship with the family. Be patient with the family and approach your relationship with humility, openness, and understanding.

#### 8. Be Aware of Power Dynamics

Although the refugees should always be viewed as capable and independent, you are ultimately the guide and volunteer, and can accidentally fall into an unhealthy power dynamic with the refugee. Avoid situations where the refugee may feel compelled to do something outside of their comfort zone due to a need to please you or the other volunteers. For example, try not to put the refugee on the spot by asking her to speak about her country. Do not imply that he should attend certain social events if he is not genuinely interested. If the goal of the activity is to directly create further self-sufficiency and independence for the refugee, then it is important; if not, then approach the situation sensitively.

#### 9. Start Learning the Refugee's Language

As the refugees start to develop their English skills, you can also simultaneously start learning their language. There are many resources online that can teach how to say basic phrases in a variety of languages, from Swahili to Hakha Chin. Be sure to identify the dialect that the refugee speaks: for example, Arabic spoken in Syria is quite different from Arabic spoken in Morocco, and sometimes unintelligible. A few key phrases in a refugee's native language can go a long way in building trust and mutual respect.

#### *\*Recording your Volunteer Time and Donations*

*Throughout your time as a volunteer, it is important to keep records of everything you are donating, including hours, material goods, and driving mileage. HIAS NY may request this information, particularly for some programs (such as the Matching Grant employment program) You also may be able to receive personal tax deductions on some contributions.*

## 1. Orientation and Initial Connections

*HIAS NY is ultimately responsible for the provision of all Reception and Placement (R&P) Services. Members of the community connections committee will undergo HIAS NY's community connections training and will coordinate regularly with HIAS NY staff.*

One of the most integral aspects of refugee resettlement and integration is the connections they form with their community, both within and across identity boundaries. The “social capital” that results from such connections fosters professional advancement, feelings of social belonging, and improved mental health for refugees, as well as openness and welcome in host communities. As a Community Connections volunteer, your role is to serve as a resource to inform refugees of these opportunities and guide refugees to deeply engage with their communities. Much of this work will be determined by the refugees themselves - their culture, level of English, and comfort level in various settings - but the goal is to make these connections, cushion first interactions, and reach deeply into the networks of the host institution to put refugees on the path to success, social inclusion, and integration.

The services of the short-term Community Connections pathway can be broken down into the following areas: a) understand background and needs of the refugee individual or family, b) community organizations and public services, and c) transportation orientation and d) creating community bridges.

### **1a) Understand Background and Needs of the Refugee Individual or Family**

Prior to a refugee's arrival, HIAS NY will have access to broad biographical information about the case: country of origin, language, educational level, and religion for each member of the household. Some of this information might have been incorrectly documented, so you should not make any grand assumptions before interacting with the refugee family directly. When the refugee individual or family arrives, keep in mind the information you learned about them in the biographical profile, while also avoiding generalized conclusions about their identity.

Remember the following points:

*Difference within Identity Groups:* There is large fluctuation in the cultural and religious behaviors within any demographic group. “Christian” or “Muslim,” for example, may indicate a wide range of religious observance based on the country of origin, region, family habits, or specific denomination.

*Personal Preference:* When connecting refugee families with groups in the United States, it is always best to seek the refugee family's guidance and receptivity to any particular stateside group. Perhaps they identify in the same way, but do not want to be actively engaged in the community here.

*Other Conflicting Issues:* If the refugee does not want to engage, perhaps it is due to another issue entirely. For example, if a Muslim refugee arrives and you had previously arranged for a welcoming committee at their local mosque (an excellent idea) and the family resists the idea of going, there may

be deeper causes to their hesitation. Perhaps they do not think they have proper clothes, or are anxious because they may share some component of their cultural heritage, but not the same language. Perhaps they have heard that America is unwelcoming for Muslims and going to a mosque may be unwise for their future immigration status.

For any on these considerations, it is usually acceptable to offer other variations on the idea – for example, a church member coming to the house to introduce themselves, or waiting a week and then going to community meeting after the refugee family is more settled. It would generally be okay to ask for reasons behind their initial hesitation, but if they resist answering, drop the subject and do not pry.

### **1b) Connect with Community Organizations and Public Services**

Provide an overall community orientation for new arrivals in coordination with HIAS NY staff. Once housing is assured, research possible community connections for the refugee. COR's curriculum on [Community Services](#) can be found here, with curriculum materials translated in [Arabic](#). This may include community associations, community centers, Police Action League (PAL) Centers, after-school centers, shops, libraries, or parks. Design an orientation that revolves around the particular family and neighborhood. It is always best to explore areas in person instead of simply looking at a map or pictures online. Maps and virtual platforms may be difficult to comprehend and it is always best, particularly in the beginning, to navigate through their communities in person. This will likely take place in stages throughout a refugee's first months of welcome. With guidance from COR, orient the family to community resources, public services, and landmarks in their area.

**Accessing Community Resources:** In collaboration with the Housing Volunteers, introduce members of the refugee family to community resources that they can travel to by themselves. As you go, explain street and directional signs, what is a “cross street,” and how to navigate intersections. This may include accompanying them, finding them a “buddy” in the center or community to guide them, or giving them a tour (with permission) of the respective space. Community resources are key because they will help refugees access other support services long after HIAS NY and volunteers have tapered out. Community associations, in particular, can be gateways to civic participation.

**Accessing Public Services:** You can also orient refugees to local public services, such as fire stations and police stations. The [US Laws and Refugee Status Toolkit](#) created by CORE may be helpful. Again, it is greatly encouraged to go in person and visit community services instead of relying on pictures only. A visit to the police station or the firehouse can have much more impact than showing a picture. Emphasize how and when to dial 911 in case of an emergency, and make sure refugees know how to say “I need a \_\_\_ interpreter” or “I speak \_\_\_\_.” 911 cannot always locate an individual on a cell phone, and the refugee will need to give their address.

### **1c) Conduct Transportation Orientation**

Transportation is a key component of self-reliance and should be a priority upon arrival. While in the beginning refugees may have excellent networks of volunteers supporting them, these resources will dwindle as time goes on. Refugees need to learn the basics of public transport within the first two weeks in the United States.

Plan a transportation orientation with the family, to include the following topics:

- ☐ Bus/train passes, methods to purchase them, and how to refill/renew passes.
- ☐ Reading a bus/train schedule.
- ☐ Locating local bus/train stops.
- ☐ Bus/train etiquette (e.g. wait in line, standing to let an elderly or pregnant person sit, etc.).
- ☐ How to board a bus/train and swipe or show a ticket.
- ☐ Asking the conductor/bus driver for assistance or directions.
- ☐ Asking for directions if lost (on the street).

Even though cars may be more prevalent in your community, vehicle ownership may be out of reach for refugees for some months/years, so they will have to rely on public transportation in the short-term. If a refugee family is unfamiliar with public transport, encourage patience and try to discourage dependence on a volunteer network for transportation.

**Paratransit Services:** If a refugee is unable to take the bus or train due to a disability, coordinate with the Health Volunteer to access paratransit services. After these services are assured, train the refugee household on how to call for paratransit services without the help of a volunteer. This may take some time and patience, depending on the family's English language proficiency.

### **1d) Foster Community Bridges**

Upon arrival, refugees are often socially isolated and lack connectivity to cultural and social institutions. Often, these relationships develop over time through individual refugee networks and word of mouth. Community connections, however, can be expedited, widened, and deepened through volunteer involvement and creative thinking. Below are some areas to explore prior to the refugee's arrival and with the refugees after arrival.

**Refugee Community Bridges:** In almost any community across the United States, there are refugee or immigrant communities that may provide a sense of comfort and familiarity for the newly arrived refugee family. This community may not have a formal organization, but rather comprise a loose association of individuals, congregations, or neighborhoods, and may require some degree of creative networking.

*Note: Not all refugees will want to engage with their ethnic or religious community. Always take the lead from the refugee family, and provide an opportunity for them to politely decline an invitation or suggestion. Check with them before setting up a meeting or making any commitments on their behalf.*

**Research:** Is there a refugee community of the same or similar origin to the new arrival in your location? Depending on how long the refugee has lived in their country of first asylum, they may also wish to be connected to those communities in the US. For example, an Iraqi refugee living in Jordan for many years may appreciate connections with the Jordanian-American community. Is there an Ethnic Community Based Organization (ECBO, and formerly Mutual Assistance Associations) for the refugee's community? If the ECBO is not in the immediate vicinity, could the refugee plug in remotely, if interested?

*Connect:* If a community of individuals from a similar background is located in the vicinity, connect the refugee in person and teach them public transport to go themselves. Check in with the refugee family to see how the relationships are going. It may be helpful to take both the new refugee and a member of their larger ethnic community to events or outings together. This enables the new arrival to demonstrate gratitude and reciprocate the guidance and support they may have received to their new acquaintances.

**Religious Community Bridges:** Joining a religious community can add a sense of value, spiritual health, and community participation to a refugee's life.

*Research:* First, contact HIAS NY for religious information on the refugee family. Contact local mosques, churches, or synagogues, or other institutions close the refugee's home to gauge openness to a refugee addition to their institution, availability of a mentor or friend who could make the refugee comfortable during their first few visits, and for the days and times of services or upcoming festivals.

*Connect:* After the refugee's arrival, present the information to the family to gauge receptivity. If they are open to engagement with a religious community, offer to connect the refugee with the pastor/imam/church leader/volunteer and accompany them the first couple of times to services or prayer. If they are interested in continuing a relationship with a particular institution, ensure they understand how to go to and from their place of worship on their own.

**Hobby and Special Interest Bridges:** Participation in familiar activities in an unfamiliar context can be extremely comforting. Upon getting to know a family, find out what their hobbies were back home. Common threads may include: cooking, sewing, sports, art (ceramics, painting), teaching or child care, gardening, or exercise (running, walking). Finding resources in the community that can reconnect refugees with activities they enjoy or do well can be reinvigorating and build confidence.

*Research:* This will have two parts. First, find out what members of the refugee household enjoy doing or what they might enjoy participating in (perhaps something new!). Having a list of potential activities with pictures or YouTube videos to demonstrate is a good idea. Second, research where in the community the individual can go to do a particular activity. Prioritize locations the refugee can reach themselves or honestly investigate your ability to consistently transport the refugee to the activity location. Be sure not to confuse your enthusiasm or love for an activity with a refugee's desire to engage in an activity. While it is excellent to invite a refugee to participate in an activity that hosts engage, be sure to gauge receptivity and desire to continue to engage.

*Connect:* Propose several options of community engagement to the refugee, both short and long-term. If they seem interested, offer to accompany them at first and make it clear they have a choice whether or not to go back. It may be easiest to find an activity for the children in the family first and then ease into the idea with adults. Elderly refugees are the least likely to form connections, but are some of the most vulnerable to depression and social isolation. People who are elderly or have disabilities and cannot work may be eligible for Adult Medical Day Care. Consult with the Health volunteers about this option.

**Activity Bridges:** One-time or short-term activities in the community can expose refugees to new activities, spaces, and people that they may not have been familiar with. Community activities create a sense of cohesion and inclusion.

*Research:* Upon arrival, refugees are on an extremely tight budget and do not have disposable income for leisure activities, greatly limiting their ability to socialize and enjoy mainstream American life. As a Community Connections volunteer, you can research free activities for the new arrivals. For ticketed events, you may be able to obtain free passes with a bit of advocacy. Ideas may include:

- Parks & playgrounds
- Free museum days
- Farmer's Markets (often with music, and usually accept Food Stamps and WIC)
- Art galleries
- The great outdoors: hiking, walking, fishing, swimming
- Community gardens (can be low cost, or free depending on income)
- Sports games on certain days
- Recreation Centers (e.g. YMCA)
- Pick up soccer leagues
- Libraries (particularly look for free programming – movie nights, Mom/Tots programming, book clubs, etc.)
- Free outdoor movies
- Computer labs
- [Community schools](#)
- [Meet-up](#) groups

*Connect:* This is the fun part! Find activities and locations the refugee family would enjoy going to and arrange a field trip for you and them. Be aware that many of the things that seem commonplace to US-born individuals may not be familiar to newcomers. For example, the concept of a library may seem strange, and the methods for checking out books stranger still. Each trip should include an orientation, including location purpose, frequency, transportation, cost (if any), and any logistical details (calendars or procedures) and how to get that information in the future (information desks or resource desks).

## 2. Civic and Social Integration

The process of social integration and increasing social capital is one of years, not months. All of the “bridging” activities above will need follow-up, expansion and legwork throughout the first year. However, as the refugee family becomes more comfortable in their new surroundings and likely busier (with school, English classes, training, work, etc.), there are additional social bridging activities to deepen your connection with the family and further integrate them into the tapestry of their communities. It is important to mention that there will not be a hard break between activities in the short/medium and long term, rather all activities will be ongoing and will be a judgement call on behalf of the volunteers. Below are additional ideas for this time frame, but keep in mind that timeframes are fluid and will take judgement.



**Civics Orientation:** As the refugee begins to settle in and adjust, it may be a good time to delve deeper into cultural orientation and discuss citizenship and civic participation. Refugees arrive in the United States to find a new and permanent home for themselves and their children, and learning the history, laws, and political backdrop to their new home can be fascinating. For example, this class in New York City teaches ["Civics as a Second Language."](#)

*This may include the following activities:*

- Participation in a community meeting with a local representative.
- Visiting or arranging a group visit to an elected official.
- Visiting local government landmarks for a tour.
- Visiting an exhibit that highlights the evolution of immigrant or voter rights in the United States.
- Getting tours of public services, such as the fire house, police station, or local hospital.
- Going over immigration timelines found through the [Statue of Liberty Foundation](#) or on [YouTube](#) to talk about the history of welcome and struggle that led to the United States today.
- Using civics curriculum or flashcards to go over with the family, trading information about the United States for information about their home country. Flashcards can be found here: [USCIS](#).
- Arranging a community service project where the refugee can assist (cleanup or serving food to the homeless, etc.) and talk about social as well as civic responsibility. Although it may seem bizarre for wealthier Americans to suggest a refugee volunteer, many refugees are eager to give back to the community and country that accepted them. If they are not working, they may loathe to sit idle when they could be contributing. This can also establish a work history in the United States, which is a very positive step towards finding a first job.
- Set up the family with a newer arrival for them to give the new refugee tours and show them "the ropes."

**Host Refugee Welcome Dinners:** When asked if they've ever had dinner at the home of US-born Americans, a large percentage of foreign-born individuals respond that they have not. Sharing food and opening your home to strangers is part of culture in many parts of the world and is an excellent forum for welcome, connections, and cross-cultural learning on both sides. To read about an overview of cultural practices in the home country of the refugee, see [Cultural Crossing](#).

*Here are some ideas that may make Welcome Dinners a success:*

- Host a dinner bi-weekly for the refugee family.
- Dinners can rotate between households for the refugee family to feel the full extent of welcome.
- If the family's English level is low, it may be smart to have Google Translate nearby, name plates for dinner items and table setup in English (e.g. "Plate" or "Carrots"). This will help make sure that the dinner has conversation flow (or at least ESL practice).
- Be cognizant of food preferences and culture. Many cultures do not eat pork; others do not eat beef. Be cognizant also of food preferences or allergies. If you want to try and cook a dish from the refugee's country, great! There are many websites to explore, such as: [Syrian Cooking](#), where you can follow a recipe. Or, cook a meal with the family and let them teach you.
- When the refugee family is financially able (and perhaps before), they may wish to host volunteers for dinner. This is of course acceptable and understandable, but be cognizant of budgetary constraints without being insulting. Hosting may be an important thank you from the family, but done too frequently can have a serious budgetary impact. If the refugee family would like to host, but you sense it may be a burden, ask the family to teach you how to make the dish they were to

prepare, including grocery shopping (without paying) and cooking in the refugee's or volunteer's kitchen.

- Invite other community members or friends to the welcome dinners. Particularly those that may have some connection that will be helpful, amusing, or interesting to the family. For example, if the refugee is interested in art, inviting a local art gallery worker or owner may be interesting for all, or if a refugee was a teacher, inviting the principal of the local school or the head of the day care center may be a good idea. Facilitate these connections by suggesting individuals trade contact information at the close of the dinner (if the interactions go well).
- Name tags may be helpful. Just as refugee names may be unfamiliar to US-born hosts, so host names may be unfamiliar or awkward to the refugees. Name tags can help memory, pronunciation, and increase the comfort level of the refugee family. You could have all nametags written in English, and in the language of the family (they can help with this part).
- Research customs of gift giving and hosting for the country of origin of the refugee. This may be particularly important in dinners early within the resettlement timeframe.

### 3. Community Building

As mentioned above, community welcome and belonging will be a continuous process. Be sure to continue to be in touch to engage in the community and ensure the refugee family is forming meaningful connections.

Continuing to engage with the refugee family, looping them into free events, new activities that occur in each season (Ice skating rink? Outward bound trips for low-income youth? Organized snow ball fights? Sledding? Beaches?) will be critical as other supports decrease. Community Connections volunteers can support a refugee throughout their first year in the United States and beyond, enabling access and resources to engage with neighbors, communities, and elected officials. This will be critical in their future success.

**Holiday Celebrations:** Depending on when a refugee arrives in the calendar year, holidays may occur at any point within this Pathway. Holiday celebrations are often significant to refugees and hosts alike and can be an excellent point of connection for new Americans. Celebrating both the refugee's cultural and religious holidays as well as the host's holidays (religious, national, other – such as Father's Day), can be a learning experience and an opportunity to grow closer and have fun.

This may include inviting the refugee family to their host's holidays (Shabbat dinner or Passover, Hanukkah, Rosh Hashanah, Christmas, Eid, Holi, etc.), celebrating the refugee family's holidays, or creating a "faux holiday" on holidays where neither the host nor the refugee would ordinarily celebrate. For example, take the refugee family to a movie and to eat Chinese food on Christmas (if neither the host nor the refugee are Christian). Trick or Treating with the refugee family, celebrating Mother's or Father's Day or International Women's Day may also be excellent opportunities to celebrate. Frequently, there are events for World Refugee Day or International Women's Day or International Youth Day hosted by HIAS NY or other resettlement agencies. Refugee participation in these events is greatly encouraged. [Holidays and observances around the world](#) is an excellent resource. Often, in

major religions, holidays happen on a different date each calendar year, so be sure to check the dates of holidays in the current year for accuracy.

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Forming and maintaining community ties can foster social cohesion, integration, and success for new Americans. It is the hope of HIAS that volunteers can go beyond the activities listed here to think creatively about welcome and how it ties into the Community Connections Pathway. If there are any questions about these or other materials, please do not hesitate to contact HIAS NY staff.

## **Documentation & Citizenship Volunteer Guide**

## 1. Legal Status and Documentation

**\*\*This section provides background information about refugees' legal status in the United States and pathway to citizenship. However, HIAS NY will refer all clients to an authorized immigration legal services provider for any immigration-related legal services.\*\***

*HIAS NY is ultimately responsible for the provision of all Reception and Placement Services. Members of the community connections committee will undergo HIAS NY's community connections training and will coordinate regularly with HIAS NY staff.*

All refugees admitted to the United States are on a path to citizenship and enjoy legal status under US law, but are required to adjust their status to lawful permanent residency (a green card) and are eligible to apply for citizenship after five years. Adjusting status for a refugee is a critical and distinctive component of integration into American society. It is essential for refugees to adjust status from refugee status (denoted by the I-94) to Lawful Permanent Resident (Green Card) to Citizen (Certificate of Naturalization). Some key reasons include the ability to continuously receive Social Security Income (either for disability or old age), the ability to continuously receive cash assistance, the ability to receive Medicare, eligibility for government jobs, and eligibility for some scholarships. Furthermore, it is critical for refugees to naturalize to have the full legal protections of U.S. citizens against deportation.

*Note: Adjusting status is a complex process and it is essential that you, as a volunteer with HIAS NY, **\*do not give solicited or unsolicited legal advice to a refugee or fill out paperwork on their behalf.** \* This can put the refugee in jeopardy and make you liable. Always direct refugees to HIAS NY for questions on immigration. HIAS NY will refer clients to an immigration attorney, or a Board of Immigration Appeals Accredited Representative as needed. Reliable information on refugee adjustment of status to permanent residency can be found on the [USCIS website](https://uscis.gov).*

Understanding their legal status upon entry, the importance of adjusting their status to lawful permanent residency, and ongoing preparation to become U.S. citizens are some of the most important ways that refugees will integrate and feel connected with their community and new home. Here, we discuss three main steps to this pathway: a) understand legal status and timeline, b) obtain other important documents, and c) conduct orientation on laws and citizenship.

### 1a) Understanding Legal Status and Timeline

#### **Refugee Status (approx. 0-12 months after arrival)**

*Important document(s): I-94 (refugees also receive an Employment Authorization Document, but the I-94 is the primary indicator of refugee status)*

- Refugees arrive with refugee status; nothing needs to be done after arrival to assure this status. Refugees arrive with an important document denoting this status called the “Boarding Letter” issued by the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. This letter includes the photo, A (alien) number, gender, date of birth, country of birth/nationality, and case number of all individuals in the case. There is one letter per family.
- The I-94 Admission Record (one per person) should be printed out (ask HIAS NY staff for guidance) immediately after arrival or as soon as available. The I-94 is essential for applying for social security numbers and for enrollment in public benefits.
- Refugees are eligible to apply for and receive a Social Security Card without restrictions or time limits, usually within 7 days in the US. The refugee should keep the social security card *at home*.
- Refugees resettled in the U.S. are authorized to work upon arrival. The Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card is automatically sent to HIAS NY after their arrival. This card is a U.S. government-issued photo ID card and as such is very important. It may take several weeks for the EAD cards to arrive.
- Refugee status is granted indefinitely, but refugees are required to apply for adjustment of status to lawful permanent residency after 365 days in the U.S.
- If the refugee would like to travel outside of the United States, they need a [Refugee Travel Document](#).
- **Refugees are restricted from travel back to their country of origin. If they travel back to their country of origin, it may jeopardize their refugee status and ability to re-enter the country. For any questions about travel, refugees should consult HIAS NY, an immigration attorney, or a Board of Immigration Appeals-Accredited Representative.**

#### Lawful Permanent Resident Status/Green Card (approx. 12 months – 5 years after arrival)

*Important document: Green Card*

- Information here: [Permanent Resident Status](#)
- Refugees are required to apply for their Green Card after one year of residency in the US. If they submit their application any time before 365 continuous days in the U.S., it will be automatically rejected. If they travel outside of the country, e.g. for two months, this time does not count as “time in the US” – they will need to wait for one year and two months before applying for their Green Card.
- There are some restrictions based on criminal history.
- Refugees do not need to know English to receive a Green Card.
- Refugees should start to seek out legal resources and prepare paperwork and documentation 10-11 months after arrival.
- Refugees will need to have copies of their I-94 and other documents to apply for a Green Card.
- Each family member will need their own application.
- Filing is free (for refugees). There will be a biometrics service fee, which is subject to change and should be confirmed on the USCIS website immediately prior to applying for adjustment of status.

#### Citizenship (approx. 5 years and onwards after arrival)

*Important document: Certificate of Naturalization*

- Information here: [Citizenship](#)
- Refugees are eligible to apply for citizenship 90 days prior to their five year anniversary of permanent residence, which after adjustment of status is rolled back to the date of admission into the United States. Refugees are eligible to receive citizenship after 5 years of residence.



- There are certain requirements, which include knowledge of English, U.S. history and civics, continuity of residency, good moral character, and others. For a full list, see [USCIS](#).

## **1b) Obtain Other Important Documents**

Teach and reinforce the importance of documentation. The U.S. is “a land of paper” for many refugees who did not need to keep track of such a quantity and range of documents back home. Additionally, it may be difficult for the refugee to understand which document is which, if they do not have a strong grasp on written English. The refugee will already be connected with:

*I-94:* This is given to them upon arrival to the U.S.

*Employment Authorization Card:* In the coming weeks, HIAS NY will receive each family member’s Employment Authorization Document and deliver it to the family.

*Social Security Card:* In the coming weeks, HIAS NY will help refugees apply for their social security card and they should receive it within 4-6 weeks after arrival.

*Mail:* All important accounts and documents are linked with the refugee’s address, and mail will start arriving to the family’s house (e.g. benefits letter and lease).

*Other documents and processes will require your support:*

**Change of Address Form:** All refugees are required to notify USCIS within 10 days when they change addresses within the United States (including their first address). Find the form here: [Change of Address Requirement](#) (Form AR-11). By law, each time a refugee moves in the US, they must complete a change of address form. This can affect their citizenship status in the future. Refugees can change their address [online](#) or by [mail](#). HIAS NY staff will complete the AR-11 with the refugee(s).

**State ID:** The State ID will allow the refugee to have a document with their address that allows them to easily identify as a resident while feeling comfortable leaving their I-94, Social Security, and EAD card at home. The State ID can also be replaced for minimal cost, if lost. Individuals can have either a State ID or a Driver’s License, so when a refugee decides to apply for a license, they will have to turn in their State ID.

**Driver’s License:** Many refugees know how to drive, and may have had a driver’s license in their home country. Sometimes a driver’s license can lead to increased job opportunities. Investigate the laws in your area governing international driver’s licenses. If the refugee is a new driver, but is interested in taking classes (consider English level and financial capability), make a connection with a local, affordable driver’s education program in their community, or walk them through the steps of testing and licensing. If possible, connect the refugee with someone who can help him/her practice driving.

*Note: Some refugees may prioritize purchasing a new car as part of their new lives in America. Encourage them to consider their financial capacity to purchase and maintain a car (including insurance, monthly payments, gasoline, repairs) and if it is a financially viable option for the family. There are strong pros and cons to purchasing a car: it is an important and sometimes complex decision.*

## **1c) Conduct Orientation on Laws and Citizenship**



While giving legal advice is inappropriate, giving refugees a *comprehensive orientation to U.S. Laws and Citizenship* is integral to their ability to adapt to U.S. culture and adjust their status over time. This is also part of Cultural Orientation. [COR's curriculum on U.S. Laws and Immigration](#) will provide a good foundation, but there are additional resources online for understanding key laws in the U.S. (e.g., from [Ethiopian Community Development Council](#)). If a refugee asks you a question that you do not know the answer to, refer them to an immigration lawyer, HIAS NY, or to an official online source (e.g. USCIS). HIAS NY staff needs to be fully aware of any immigration application or legal matters.

## 2. Family Reunification

Family reunification can be one of the most stressful aspects of displacement. Often family members are in resource constrained locations and expect remittances to survive, or are putting pressure on the new arrival to bring them to the United States. Unfortunately, the process can be grueling and take a long time. There are three main types of family reunification applications. The most well-known for refugees is the I-730 Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition, submitted by refugees in their first two years of U.S. residency, for immediate family members overseas (spouses and unmarried children under age 21). There's also the AOR, or Affidavit for Relationship, which may be submitted (for some nationalities) by U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents for some immediate family members, parents, and minor children of parents. The last is the I-130 Petition for Alien Relative, submitted U.S. citizens or Legal Permanent Residents for spouses, kids, and in some cases, siblings and parents.

The process of family reunification is constantly being updated and changed, so it is best to contact HIAS NY for guidance on family reunification for refugees. [Resources on family reunification from USCIS](#) may be helpful, but *refrain from giving guidance as it may be incorrect and it may constitute unauthorized practice of law, for which may result in prosecution*. It is not certain the U.S. government will approve reunification applications, and the process is very long and convoluted.

During the intake interview, HIAS NY will collect information about the refugees' family members and will initiate the process if any are eligible for reunification.

## 3. Preparation for Citizenship

Consider connecting the refugee to citizenship classes in the community. The refugee cannot achieve citizenship until 5 years after arrival, but it is advisable to make sure they are aware of resources in the community and how to access them. Also, help the family access citizenship preparation materials, such as citizenship flash cards or online preparation courses, with materials here: [USCIS Interactive Practice Tests](#). This can be fun and productive to practice with the family, even within the first year.

## **Other Resources**

1. Glossary of Terms
2. For Further Reading
3. School Orientation Outline
4. Tips for Using an Interpreter

## Glossary of Terms

### Affiliate

1. A regional office of an Agency, which is part of the corporate structure of the Agency (*for example, HIAS NY is a regional affiliate of HIAS, Inc.*); or
2. A public entity or a private nonprofit legal entity which has accepted in a written agreement with the Agency responsibility to provide, or ensure the provision of, reception and placement services to certain refugees sponsored by an Agency; or
3. A sub-office of an entity referred to in subparagraph 2 above that the Recipient proposes for affiliate status in the proposal for the FY 2011 program or during the course of the year, and that the Bureau agrees in writing may serve as an affiliate. A "sub-office" is defined as an office where reception and placement services are provided and refugee casefiles maintained during the reception and placement core service delivery period with management oversight provided by a nearby affiliate office. *For example, the Westchester sub-office is a sub-office of HIAS NY, which is a regional affiliate of HIAS, Inc.*

### Assurance

A written commitment, submitted by a Recipient, to provide, or ensure the provision of, the core services specified in Section 2.5 of the cooperative agreement for the refugee(s) named on the assurance form.

### Asylee

An individual in the United States or at a port of entry who is found to be unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality, or to seek the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. Persecution or the fear thereof must be based on the alien's race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

### Case Manager

The employee of the Affiliate who is responsible for the resettlement of the refugee case, including enrollment in benefits, initial welcome, and home visits. The roles of the case manager differ between agencies, but services usually last for 3 months.

### Core Services

Required services mandated by the Cooperative Agreement, a contract issued between HIAS, the Affiliate, and the State Department. These core services are intended to occur within 90 days of arrival and need to be well documented.

### Department of Social Services (DSS)

Governmental agency that manages TANF, SNAP, Child Protective Services, Medicaid, Temporary Disability, and other public benefits.

**Employment Authorization Document (EAD)**

A work permit card that refugees receive within a few weeks of arrival (although they are authorized to work immediately). EAD cards are another government form of ID.

**English as a New Language (ENL)**

More contemporary term for “ESL” and used in some states and school districts.

**English as a Second Language (ESL)**

Any English instruction program dedicated to individuals who speak another language as a primary or native language. Common term across the country.

**Green Card (Lawful Permanent Resident Card)**

Refugees can apply for a Green Card after staying in the United States for one year and complying with the law, required medical screenings, and paperwork submission.

**International Organization for Migration (IOM)**

Inter-governmental organization working in the field of migration, to provide humanitarian need and promote international cooperation to address migration issues. Provides loans for refugees to undertake international travel to the United States after approval.

**Matching Grant (MG)**

Matching Grant is an early employment program that assists refugees and asylees in obtaining a job within the first 4 months of resettlement. MG also offers financial assistance and assistance in finding and obtaining a first job.

**Medicaid**

A government insurance program for persons of all ages whose income and resources are insufficient to pay for health care.

**Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)**

A division of the US Department of Health and Human Services, ORR was developed after the passing of the US Refugee Act in 1980 to support domestic refugee resettlement.

**Preferred Communities (PC)**

Since the early 1990s, preferred communities have provided resettlement services to newly arriving refugees. Preferred communities allow ample opportunities for early employment and sustained economic independence. In addition, they support special needs populations. Two types of preferred communities programs are available: 1. Programs that receive a minimum of 100 new refugees annually. 2. Programs that receive a proposed number of cases that will need intensive case management. These programs require a history of qualifications and experience in serving special needs cases.

**Principal Applicant (PA)**

The PA is considered to be the head of the refugee case, and is usually a father or mother within the family unit. All other family members are listed as relatives of the PA, and the case will usually be referred to as the last name of the PA.

#### **PRM**

The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration within the U.S. Department of State.

#### **Reception and Placement (R&P)**

The R&P period consists of the first 90 days of resettlement, and includes all initial short-term activities to start the refugee on the path to self-sufficiency.

#### **Refugee**

A refugee is an individual who has a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, who has fled their country of origin and cannot safely return. In the context of the United States, all refugee arriving in the US have been vetted and approved prior to arrival in the country.

#### **Resettlement Agency (RA)**

Previously called a Voluntary Agency, or VOLAG. Any of the 9 agencies contracted through the State Department that are authorized to provide resettlement and placement services to newly arrived refugees. RAs may work locally, or through Affiliate partners.

#### **Self-Sufficiency**

Gross income exceeds 125% of the Federal Poverty Level for the state

#### **SGBV**

Sexual and gender-based violence

#### **Social Security Administration (SSA)**

Administers Social Security, consisting of retirement, disability, and survivor's benefits. Refugees are eligible for social security cards upon arrival, provided by SSA.

#### **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

SNAP offers financial assistance to low-income families and individuals to purchase and access nutritious food. Formerly known as Food Stamps.

#### **Special Immigrant Visa (SIV)**

A special, expedited resettlement process category for Iraqi or Afghani nationals who worked with the US Armed Forces or under Chief of Mission authority as a translator or interpreter and Iraqi nationals who worked for or on behalf of the U.S. Government in Iraq.

#### **Targeted Assistance Grant (TAG)**

TAG is a workforce development program funded through ORR and run through the state government (in the case of New York, it is run through the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance and provided to resettlement agency affiliates such as HIAS New York). The purpose of the program is "to provide, through a process of local planning and

implementation, direct services intended to result in the economic self-sufficiency and reduce welfare dependency of refugees through job placements.”

**Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)**

Provides cash assistance to American families with dependent children; operates through the US Department of Health and Human Services. Formerly known as welfare.

**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

The UN agency dedicated serving and protecting refugees around the world and facilitating repatriation, integration, or resettlement efforts.

**United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)**

USCIS, a division within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, is the government agency that oversees lawful immigration to the U.S.

**Women, Infants and Children (WIC)**

A federal assistance program of the US Department of Agriculture for healthcare and nutrition of low-income pregnant women, breastfeeding women, and infants and children under the age of five.

## **For Further Reading**

*The following resources are compiled from the 5 guides to resettlement, and organized by topic. Listed on the last page are other relevant articles and community-based resources.*

### **Access to Health Care**

#### **American Academy of Family Physicians**

To improve the health of patients, families, and communities by serving the needs of members with professionalism and creativity.

Cultural Aspects of Caring for Refugees: [website](#)

#### **Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

CDC works to protect America from health, safety, and security threats, both foreign and in the US.

Guidelines for the US Domestic Medical Examination: [website](#)

#### **Dimensions of Culture**

Cross-cultural communications for health care professionals.

Cultural Barriers to Treatment and Compliance: [website](#)

#### **HealthCare.gov**

Website created to support the implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

Why Health Insurance is Important: [website](#)

Finding Health Navigators: [website](#)

#### **US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health**

Free full-text archive of biomedical and life sciences journal literature.

Healthcare Barriers of Refugees Post-Resettlement: [website](#)

#### **Wilder Research**

Research group dedicated to enriching the lives of the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Speaking for Ourselves; Perceptions of Health Among Immigrants: [website](#)

### **Building Assets**

#### **Dream Builder**

Dream Builder harnesses the flexibility of online business skills development and certification to help women entrepreneurs achieve economic success for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Main page: [website](#)



### **Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)**

Promotes homeownership, supports community development, and increases access to affordable housing, free from discrimination.

Buying a Home: [website](#)

Homeownership and Home-buying Programs: [website](#)

### **Expanding Economic Opportunity (CFED)**

A multi-faceted organization working at the local, state and federal levels to create economic opportunity that alleviates poverty.

Individual Development Accounts: [website](#)

### **Immigrant Business**

Covers the inspiring success stories, politics and breaking news about immigrants and immigration, and first-hand tips on selling, franchising, winning government contracts.

Main page: [website](#)

### **New York City Government**

Unlocking Potential: Empowering New York City's Immigrant Entrepreneurs: [website](#)

## **Career Development**

### **Career One Stop**

Sponsored by the US Department of Labor.

American Job Center Finder: [website](#)

### **Higher Advantage**

Higher provides newcomer workforce solutions to corporations across the U.S. while supporting career entry and advancement for resettled refugees and other new Americans.

Employment Volunteer Resources: [website](#)

Downloadable Tools for Recertification: [website](#)

Financial Literacy for Newcomers (from LIRS): [website](#)

### **Refugee Center Online**

Uses technology to help refugees build new lives in the US. We offer online services and programs to help refugees and asylees gain the skills they need to achieve their goals and have successful resettlement experiences.

Career page: [website](#)

### **Upwardly Global**

Promotes change of inefficient labor markets and practices that result in employment barriers for skilled immigrants.

Information for Skilled Job Seekers [website](#)

## Civil Rights

### **AFL-CIO**

The umbrella federation for U.S. unions, with 56 unions representing 12.5 million working men and women. Working to ensure that all people who work receive the rewards of their work—decent paychecks and benefits, safe jobs, respect and fair treatment.

Your Rights at Work: [website](#)

### **Heartland Alliance**

Works with the belief that there can be no healing without justice, and no justice without healing. Work targets 12 areas around the world where human rights are threatened.

Rainbow Response: [website](#)

### **Limited English Proficiency.gov**

An interagency government website dedicated to understanding the law regarding LEP individuals.

Frequently Asked Questions: [website](#)

### **US Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights**

Through the federal civil rights laws and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule, OCR protects your fundamental nondiscrimination and health information privacy rights.

Complaint Portal: [website](#)

Rights that Protect us from Discrimination Based on Race, Color, or National Origin: [website](#)

Guidance on Title VI and the LEP persons: [website](#)

### **US Department of Justice**

To enforce the law and defend the interests of the United States according to the law.

Language Access: [website](#)

Immigration-Related Unfair Employment Practices: [website](#)

### **USA.gov**

Creates and organizes timely, needed government information and services and make them accessible to the public anytime, anywhere, via their channel of choice. Operates through the General Administration's Technology Transformation Service.

Labor Laws and Issues: [website](#)

## Cultural Education

### **Culture Crossing Guide**

A community built resource for cross-cultural etiquette and understanding.

Culture Crossing map: [website](#)

## **Healthy Lifestyles**

### **American Health Association**

To build healthier lives, free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke.

Fight Stress with Healthy Habits: [website](#)

### **BSR Her Project**

Work with the belief that all work should be empowering, and should enable women and men to improve their well-being and increase their standard of living.

Personal Hygiene: [website](#)

### **Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion**

Goal of setting national health goals and objectives and supporting programs, services, and education activities that improve the health of all Americans.

Eat Healthy, Be Active Community Workshops: [website](#)

### **HelpGuide.org**

Trusted guide to mental, emotional, and social health.

Stress Management: [website](#)

Relaxation Techniques for Stress Relief: [website](#)

### **Journal of the American Community Gardening Association (ACGA)**

Dedicated to bringing the community gardening and urban agriculture up to date information.

Stranger in a Strange Land—Immigrant Gardeners in a Nation of Immigrants: [website](#)

## **Individuals Living with Disabilities**

### **Disability Benefits Center**

U.S. government program that provides financial assistance to individuals who are unable to work due to a long-term disability.

What is Social Security Disability: [website](#)

### **Eldercare Locator**

A public service of the U.S. Administration on Aging connecting people to services for older adults and their families.

Adult Day Care: [website](#)

### **National Care Planning Council (NCPC)**

Comprehensive Resource for Eldercare, senior services, and care planning.

Adult Day Service (Adult Day Care): [website](#)

### **Special Education Guide**

Go-to resource for mastering the terminology, procedures and best practices in special education.

The IEP Process Explained: [website](#)

### **Social Security Administration**

An independent agency that administers social security, consisting of retirement, disability, and survivor's benefits.

Ticket to Work Program: [website](#)

### **US Equal Opportunity Commission**

Responsible for enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee.

The American with Disabilities Act: [website](#)

## **Education**

### **Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL)**

IEL equips leaders to prepare children and youth for college, careers, and citizenship in four different areas: 1) leadership, 2) professional development, 3) policy, and 4) innovative strategies.

About Community Schools: [website](#)

### **Job Corps**

Job Corps is a no-cost education and vocational training program administered by the US Department of Labor that helps young people ages 16 through 24 improve the quality of their lives through vocational and academic training.

Brochure: [website](#)

Find a Job Corps Center: [website](#)

### **Migration Policy Institute**

MPI provides analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at local, national, and international levels.

Credential Recognition in the US for Foreign Professionals: [website](#)

## **Financial Education**

### **Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation**

Independent agency created by the Congress to maintain stability and public confidence in the nation's financial system.

Financial Education: [website](#)

### **Financial Literacy and Education Commission**

Made up of more than 20 Federal entities that are coordinating and collaborating to strengthen financial capability and increase access to financial services for all Americans.

Resources for Teachers and Educators: [website](#)

### **Internal Revenue Service (IRS)**

Bureau of the Department of the Treasury, provides America's taxpayers top quality service by helping them understand and meet their tax responsibilities and enforce the law with integrity and fairness.

Free Tax Return Preparation for Qualifying Tax Payers: [website](#)

### **National Education Association (NEA)**

The nation's largest professional employee organization, committed to advancing the cause of public education.

Resources for Teaching Financial Literacy: [website](#)

### **WestchesterGov.com**

Website for Westchester County, New York state.

Benefits of a Bank Account: [website](#)

## **Food Access**

### **Department of Social Services (DSS)**

Federal and State funds for adoptions, foster care, aid to the disabled, family crisis counseling, subsistence payments to poor families with children, child welfare services and many other efforts are distributed through this department.

Cultural Considerations in Nutrition and Food Preparation: [website](#)

### **Feeding America**

The Feeding America network of food banks is leading the fight against hunger in communities nationwide.

Find Your Local Food Bank: [website](#)

### **US Department of Agriculture (USDA)**

Responsible for developing and executing federal laws related to farming, agriculture, forestry, and food.

SNAP-Connection and Resources: [website](#)

About SNAP: [website](#)

Choose My Plate: [website](#)

### **Women, Infants and Children (WIC):**

Through the USDA; provides Federal grants to States for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk.

About WIC: [website](#)

WIC Works Resource System: [website](#)

## **Housing**

### **Colorado Refugee Services Program (CRSP)**

Works to ensure effective resettlement of officially designated refugees and to promote refugee self-sufficiency.

Renting to Refugees: [website](#)

### **Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM)**

Serves and welcomes international refugees uprooted by persecution and violence to communities and cities around the US.

Leasing to Refugees: [website](#)

### **Mercy Housing**

A national nonprofit organization working to build a more humane world where poverty is alleviated, communities are healthy and all people can develop their full potential.

At Home with Refugee Housing: [website](#)

### **Welcoming Economies (WE) Global Network**

A regional network of immigrant economic development organizations working in cities and regions across the Midwest.

Immigrant Homeownership: [website](#)

## **Immigration Resources**

### **Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC)**

One of the nine Voluntary Agencies in the United States authorized to resettle refugees.

Basic Laws in the US: [website](#)

### **US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)**

The government agency that oversees lawful immigration to the United States.

Definition of Refugees: [website](#)

Civics Flashcards: [website](#)

I-131, Application for Travel Document: [website](#)

Green Card for Refugees: [website](#)

US Citizenship: [website](#)

Guide to Naturalization: [website](#)

Interactive Practice Tests: [website](#)

Family Reunification: [website](#)

## **Mental Health**

### **National Child Traumatic Stress Network**

Established to improve access to care, treatment, and services for traumatized children and adolescents exposed to traumatic events.

Review of Child and Adolescent Refugee Mental Health: [website](#)

Refugees and Trauma: [website](#)

Guide for Mental Health Practitioners: [website](#)

### **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

Agency within the US Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation.

Trauma-Informed Approach and Trauma-Specific Intervention: [website](#)

### **Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center**

Dedicated to improving the well-being of refugees by providing tools, resources, and support for health and mental health providers in order to better meet the needs of refugees in resettlement.

Talking about Mental Health—A Narrative Approach: [website](#)

### **Orientation Materials**

#### **Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange (CORE)**

Funded through the US Department of State to provide technical assistance on orientation materials for refugees, before and after arrival to the US. Previously the Cultural Orientation Resource Center.

The Welcome Set: [website](#)

Housing and Education Overview: [website](#)

Budgeting and Personal Finance: [website](#)

All housing resources: [website](#)

Housing guide: [website](#)

Using the garbage disposal: [website](#)

Health and Hygiene: [website](#)

Community Services and Public Assistance: [website](#)

US Laws and Refugee Status Toolkit: [website](#)

US Laws and Refugee Status: For the trainer: [website](#)

#### **Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)**

ORR helps new populations maximize their potential in the United States by linking them to critical resources that assist them in becoming integrated members of American society.

Health Insurance: [website](#)

Financial Literacy Resources: [website](#)

Working with Landlords: [website](#)

Housing publications: [website](#)

#### **US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)**

Advance the rights and lives of those who have been forcibly or voluntarily uprooted and redirect the destiny of countless vulnerable lives.

Journey of Hope Full Curriculum: [website](#)

Overcoming Barriers: Toolkit to help refugees adjust to life in the US: [website](#)

Health and Nutrition Toolkit: [website](#)

Banking on the Future Curriculum: [website](#)

### **Safety**

#### **National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)**

Helping children who have been abused to rebuild their lives, protect those at risk, and find the best ways of preventing abuse from ever happening.

Home Alone: [website](#)



### **Parents Central, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)**

Established by the Highway Safety Act of 1970 and is dedicated to achieving the highest standards of excellence in motor vehicle and highway safety. Works daily to help prevent crashes and their attendant costs, both human and financial.

Car Seat Recommendations for Children: [website](#)

### **Safe Bee Website and Newsletter**

Safe Bee's mission is to make the world a safer place.

When you Should and Shouldn't Call 911: [website](#)

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## **Articles Found in the Guide**

Ohio State Students Develop Program to Help Local Immigrants Navigate the Drugstore: [website](#)

Refugee Health Partners Program on the Student Group page at Johns Hopkins: [website](#)

Cancer Connects program in NY: [website](#)

Why Landlords love Renting to Refugees: [website](#)

What Do You Learn in a Grocery Store Tour: [website](#)

Marketing Opportunities for Newcomers' Orientation Phase: [website](#)

The Huddled Masses, America's Immigration History: [website](#)

Making Change: Civics as a Second Language: [website](#)

Map the Impact of Immigration Across the Nation: [website](#)

Immigration Timeline: [website](#)

Holidays and Observances around the World: [website](#)

From Refugee Camp to Big Man at Virginia Western: [website](#)

Soccer Without Borders USA: [website](#)

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## **Suggested Reading: Books**

*Human Cargo: A Journey Among Refugees.* By Caroline Moorehead.

*The Middle of Everywhere.* By Mary Pipher.

*The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down.* By Anne Fadiman.

*What is the What.* By Dave Eggers and Valentino Achak Deng.

*Tears of the Desert.* By Halima Bashir.

*The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas.* By Anand Giridharadas.  
*A Backpack, a Bear, and Eight Crates of Vodka.* By Lev Golinkin.  
*Zlata's Diary.* By Zlata Filipović.  
*Courageous Journey: Walking the Lost Boys Path from the Sudan to America.* By Barbara Youree, Ayuel Leek, and Beny Ngor.  
*A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain.* By Robert Olen Butler.  
*Little Daughter: A Memoir of Survival in Burma and the West.* By Zoya Phan.  
*Silent Exodus: Portraits of Iraqi Refugees in Exile (Photo Essay).* By Khaled Hosseini and Zalmi.

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### Suggested Reading: Articles

"For Poorer, for Richer - The Burmese Change Buffalo." The Buffalo News.  
<http://projects.buffalonews.com/long-reads/burma/day-two.html>

A Wary Start to Syrian refugees' new life in Kentucky. The Washington Post.  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/a-wary-start-to-syrian-refugees-new-life-in-kentucky/2015/12/26/cb2cb4f0-a990-11e5-9b92-dea7cd4b1a4d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/a-wary-start-to-syrian-refugees-new-life-in-kentucky/2015/12/26/cb2cb4f0-a990-11e5-9b92-dea7cd4b1a4d_story.html)

U.S Reaches Goal of Admitting 10,000 Syrian Refugees. Here's Where They Went. The New York Times. [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/08/30/us/syrian-refugees-in-the-united-states.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/08/30/us/syrian-refugees-in-the-united-states.html?_r=0)

Refugees Encounter a Foreign Word: Welcome. The New York Times.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/01/world/americas/canada-syrian-refugees.html>

Unsettled Journeys. The Baltimore Sun. <http://data.baltimoresun.com/news/unsettled-journeys/splash/>

## School Orientation Outline

This school orientation is intended to serve as a supplemental tool to the Education Guide. This is an outline of conversations that you should have with the family before the child starts school; these modules can be laced in with other activities, or discussed in one longer session. Throughout the orientation, invite questions, and pause at certain points to assess their comprehension with open ended questions (e.g. “So, tell me why good attendance is important” or “What are acceptable reasons to be absent?” rather than yes/no questions such as “Do you understand?”)

Remember that some parents and students cannot read in English or their native language, so for these families or individuals, try to focus on descriptions or pictures instead of relying on text or long passages. Teach to the lowest education level in the family (e.g. if the father cannot read and the mother can, teach to the father’s level so he can participate) and adapt your presentation method as you go based on their reactions and follow-up questions.

### Understanding the Education System in the United States

Refer to the attached diagrams of the educational path in the US (based on literacy level). For many immigrant and refugee students, the path of education in the US is different than that of their home country. Working your way up from the bottom, discuss each step of the education process, who qualifies, if it’s mandatory or optional, and the associated costs. If you are working with an interpreter, they could write the name of each of the educational steps on the outline.

Talk about the educational level of each of the family members through questions. “Ameer, you’re 10 years old. Where are you on this education path?” “Tumaini, you completed high school and have your diploma from Congo. What are your next options? What might be best for you?” For primary school, grade level is determined by age, not previous educational attainment, so that classes are composed of children of the same age cohort. Explain this to the family, and that regardless of the child’s grade level, they will have help in learning English.

### Things in a School

Parts of this section may be unnecessary for some families, but it is always advisable to check. This portion can be completed on a walking tour of the school, or by printing out picture flashcards (attached) to show each item. Feel free to make your own flashcards with school/specific information. You can sit in a circle with all family members and spread out the picture cards to guide your discussion. Some of these items are grade-specific: e.g., a high schooler wouldn’t have a playground. For young kids, rely on miming, actions, and gestures to keep their attention.

- *Locker/Cubby*: What do you keep in here?
- *Water fountain*: How to drink from a water fountain, what it might look like.
- *Bathroom (boy’s and girl’s sign)*: How to tell which bathroom to use.
- *Playground*: Young kids get to play outside: important to wear weather-appropriate clothing.

- *Lunch*: Picture of a school lunch, tray, counter: How to get food, what the food is like.
- *Backpack*: What should you have in your backpack? Good to keep it organized and clear.
- *School bus vs. City bus*: What does each look like? What's the difference between them?
- *Bus stop*: How to wait in line for the bus, what time the bus will arrive, be careful crossing the street.
- *Nurse's office*: When do you go here? This is also the place to bring updated vaccination records.
- *Gymnasium*: An elective on some days. What to wear on these days? What do you do in gym class?
- *Art room*: Another elective for young kids. Might also take music class.
- *Main office*: Show picture: when do you go to the main office?
- *School uniform (if applicable)*: What is the school uniform or dress code policy for the family?
- *Organized vs. unorganized folder*: The importance of keeping papers neat and clean.
- *Appropriate shoes (close-toed) vs flip flops*: This is particularly for younger grades.
- *Fire drill/Bell to change classes*: Don't be alarmed! It's normal and ok, just follow your peers or teacher.

### **How to be a Good Student**

School rules and guidelines might also differ. Cover the following topics with the family. First ask: What did you do to be a good student back home? What was important in the classroom? How do you think it might be the same or different here? Then talk about the following themes.

**Attendance:** Attendance is important in the US and teachers track the students' attendance every day. Part of their grades (or "marks") depend on the number of days they were present and absent. Ask: Did your school back home have an attendance policy? What happened if you missed a day of school? How can you make sure you're going to school every day? (Look for answers like wake up early with an alarm, get ready quickly, finish homework the night before, arrive to the bus stop/school early).

**Absences:** Sometimes it's ok to be absent. Ask: When do you think it's ok to be absent? (Look for a doctor's visit, if the child is sick, or a significant religious or cultural holiday such as Eid or Diwali). For all these reasons, it is alright to miss school, but you need a note from either a doctor or a parent.

With the family, write a simple, sample absence note where they can fill in the blanks. For children under 16 (this rule may be different in each state) it is actually illegal to miss school and the parent can be penalized with fines or court summons for extended absences without an excuse.

**Copying/cheating:** Simulate copying off of someone's test or homework. Ask: what is happening here? Is this allowed or not? Talk about how copying someone else's work, including another classmate's, from a textbook, or from the internet, is not allowed in the US. Sometimes kids do it, but it is not right! It is better to ask the teacher a question, or try to answer as much as you can and turn in the paper semi-blank.

**Getting the teacher's attention:** Raise your hand and ask: why am I doing this? What does this gesture mean? (Look for: I have a question, I know the answer to a question, I need to ask the teacher something, I need to go to the bathroom or get a drink of water). Speak about how it's good to raise your hand in class and participate in the lesson. Teachers like questions, and it's important to try

speaking in the class even if your English is not perfect. Practice how to ask to use the bathroom or get a drink, and recite “Bathroom please!” or “Water please!” with the kids in the family.

**Doing homework:** Ask: Did you have homework in your home country? What was the homework like? Explain: homework in the US can look very different. Sometimes it is writing, reading, or answering questions, but sometimes it is a project that requires drawing, making a model, doing research, preparing a presentation, working in a group, etc. (depending on the grade level). Sometimes homework will seem confusing, but it is important to try your best and complete as much as you can. Parents can support their children by helping them with their homework, if they can. For parents who may not have the English or educational level to assist, they can still support by sitting with the children while they’re studying, checking if they completed it, and asking them to share with they’re learning.

**Grades:** Ask: how were grades determined in your home country? (for many, they took end of the year exams and this was their grade for the year). Explain: grades in the US include a lot of different parts, and each class level and teacher may have a different system. Grades include things like attendance, working with others, effort, participation, behavior, homework, classwork, presentations, and more. This can be a good thing, because you have many opportunities to show how smart you are, instead of just taking a test! But it’s important to always try your hardest with all of your school work.

**Behavior:** (This may need to be directed at the parent for young children, who can in turn speak with their children). Explain: sometimes being a new student is hard, and if you don’t know a lot of English, it could be even harder to make new friends and communicate with others. Sometimes new students can get into misunderstandings with other students if they cannot communicate clearly, or get blamed by another student for something they didn’t do. It may be difficult for the refugee student to explain his side of the story clearly.

Explain: it is important to always try to keep your hands to yourself and not get too physically close to people. Role play some scenarios. Try to give people room, in line, in gym class, or at the lunch table. Try to smile and be friendly, even if it is just saying “hi” to others. If there are any issues with other students in the class, encourage the student to tell their parents and you as the Education Volunteer, and try to set up a phone call for the parents are school to communicate about the concerns.

**Saying ‘no’:** Tell the student that it is always alright to say ‘no’ if they don’t want to do something. Be aware that in some countries or cultures, it is incredibly rude to say ‘no’ directly. If a student feels unsafe or uncomfortable in any circumstance, it is perfectly alright to decline to participate and leave the situation.

### **How to be a Good Parent of a School-Aged Child**

**Attendance and homework:** (see above, can be addressed simultaneously with parents and children)

**Communication with the school:** Ask: What was the role of parents in the education system back home or in the refugee camp? What was the role of the teacher? Explain: the education system in

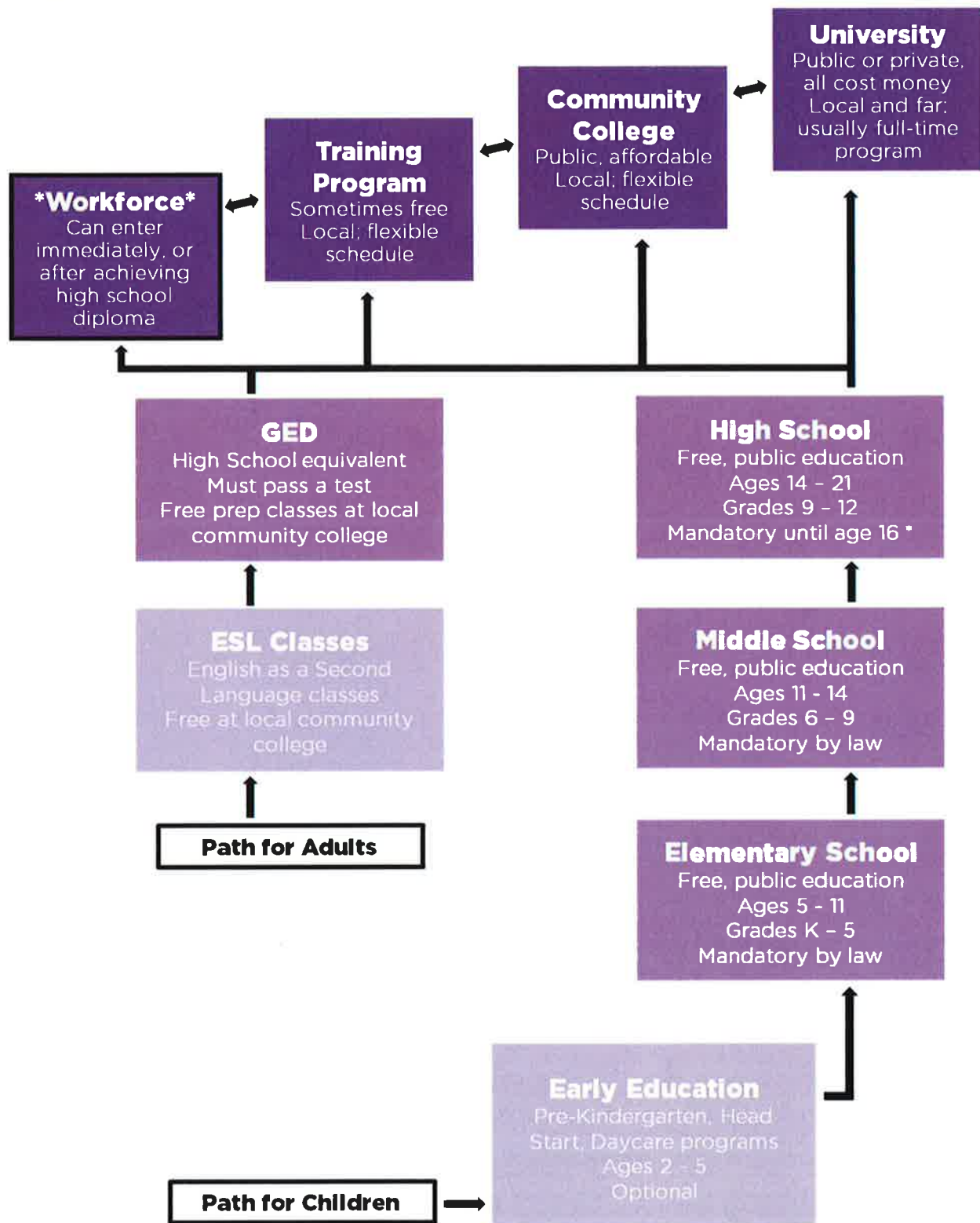
the US is highly dependent on parent involvement and communication with the school staff. This can take the shape of parent/teacher conferences, phone calls, or notes sent back and forth. Encourage them to always try to get involved and ask for an interpreter, if necessary (this may take some degree of advocacy). Even if the parents don't speak English very well, or may not be educated, they are still ultimately in charge of their children and have control over their education and future. Empower them to realize their power and important role in the school system.

**Discipline:** Ask: If a child does something wrong in your home country, what is the punishment? How did the parent punish kids? How did the teacher punish kids? Explain: in the US, physical discipline is not allowed. If a teacher, nurse, or volunteer suspects that parents are physically punishing their children (from marks, reports, or other suspicions) they are required to report it to the police. For small children, it is ok to spank them lightly, but nothing that is damaging or leaves a mark or injury. (Words about abuse or discipline are different in each language and may not transfer from English appropriately. Before this conversation, perhaps talk to the interpreter about how to differentiate between a "spank" and "hitting, abusing, or beating"). Parents can get in a lot of trouble if they hit or beat their children. Propose alternative ways to discipline children, such as a reward system, time outs, or restrictions on things like television or going out with friends.

**Supervision:** Ask: In your community back home, or in the refugee camp, where did children play? Who watched over them when they were outside, or home without their parents? Explain: in the US, appropriate child supervision is the direct responsibility of the parent. If the parent is not physically present, they are responsible for making sure that another adult is physically present. Most states do not have specific laws about child supervision, but read [here](#) for recommendations and guidelines. As an additional guideline, a babysitter should be at least 13 years old to watch young children, but not overnight. Talk about these regulations as they relate to each family member (e.g. Sangeeta is allowed to stay home alone, but isn't old enough to watch her infant sister). Remind families that just because the law says that their child is old enough to stay home alone, the parent's comfort and child's readiness and maturity to stay at home should also be strongly considered as well.

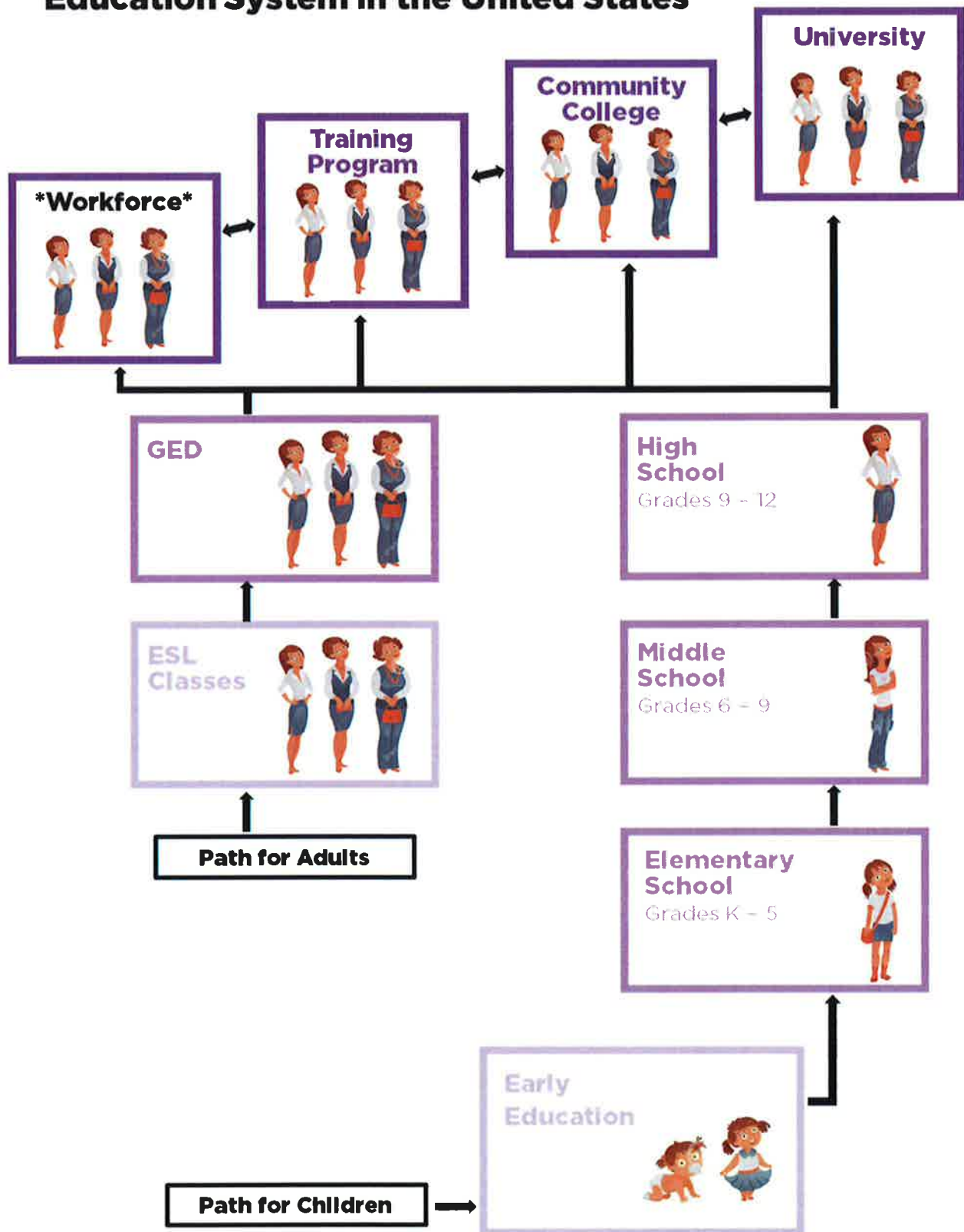
Although this orientation is intended to be used in the first month of resettlement, you may find that certain topics need to be revisited once the child begins school. Many of these topics will continue to be sources of discussion and inquiry as the family continues their academic journey in the United States. Stay patient, as the adjustment process usually takes time, and continue to converse with the family about their school experience and progress.

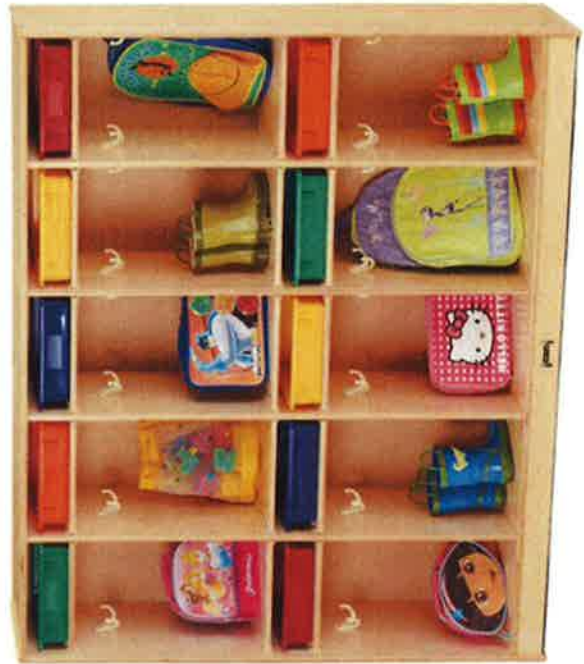
# Education System in the United States





# Education System in the United States















**Example of school uniform, e.g. navy shirt and khaki pants (if applicable)**



## Photo Sources for School Orientation

### First page

Water fountain: <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/news-blog/can-water-fountains-fight-fat-2009-03-30/>

Locker: <http://www.ebay.com/gds/Money-Saving-Tips-for-Decorating-Your-High-School-Locker-/10000000178570849/g.html>

Boys/girls bathroom sigs: <https://media2.wnyc.org/i/620/372/c/80/photologue/photos/school-bathroom-boys-and-girls.jpg>

Cubby: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/196610339956854176/>

### Second page

Cafeteria: <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/Wellness/fighting-childhood-obesity-school-cafeteria-time/story?id=19146551>

School lunch tray: <http://civileats.com/2014/02/18/state-of-the-tray-will-recent-improvements-in-school-food-be-rolled-back/>

Backpack: <http://www.crazybackpacks.com/backpacks-back-to-school/>

Recess: [http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2013/01/editorial\\_recess\\_is\\_not\\_all\\_fun.html](http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2013/01/editorial_recess_is_not_all_fun.html)

### Third page

School nurse: <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/SchoolNurse>

School Bus: <http://www.rockstarlimo.net/transportation/school-buses/>

City Bus: <http://dreemahautomobile.com/product/13-14m-public-transit-bus-xmq6141g/>

Art class: <http://oluscenter.com/programs.php?id=enrichment>

Waiting for the bus: <http://1stclasshamptonroads.com/5-school-bus-safety-tips-to-start-the-new-school-year-off-right/>

### Fourth page

Fire drill: <http://oakbayfirefighters.com/community/fire-prevention-week-school-fire-drillsgrade-three-fire-and-safety-house/>

Fire alarm image: <http://www.campbellpropertymanagement.com/blog/2015/09/14/maintaining-your-condominium-fire-alarm-system/>

Music class: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/355854808026677930/>

Front desk: <http://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/in/2015/08/21/a-question-of-fairness-weighted-budgeting-would-affect-teachers-students/#.WBy6ndUrKUk>

Organized folder: <https://freespiritpublishingblog.com/2015/01/07/guest-post-get-organized-how-to-cope-with-clutter/>

Unorganized folder: <http://www.classic-play.com/tween-years-schoolwork-organization/>

### Fifth page

Gym class: <http://love.lambeth.gov.uk/new-resource-for-special-education-needs-and-disability-information/gym-class/>

Sneakers: <http://www.versusbattle.com/kids-sneakers-velcro-fasteners-vs-shoelaces/>

Flip flops: [https://www.jcrew.com/boys\\_category/shoes/flipflopsandsandals/PRDOVR~39659/39659.jsp](https://www.jcrew.com/boys_category/shoes/flipflopsandsandals/PRDOVR~39659/39659.jsp)



## Tips for a Using an Interpreter

**Introduce the Interpreter:** Briefly introduce the interpreter as someone that will facilitate conversation. Tell the provider (and remind the interpreter) that the interpreter will say exactly what you, the provider, and the refugee is saying. Defining the interpreter's role sets the stage for the interpreter to act professionally and strictly within his/her role.

**Speak in First Person:** Volunteers and interpreters should both speak in the first person, e.g. if the volunteer says: "Today we will write your resume..." then the interpreter should NOT say: "She said that today you'll write your resume..." Professional interpreters repeat EXACTLY as the provider says and as the client says, as if they were the provider/client.

**Interpreters Should Never 'Explain:'** Interpreters are there for communication purposes *only*: not to act as providers. The provider (or the volunteer) should be the giver of information. If the interpreter begins to give information, you risk not knowing what information the client is receiving. Be safe and only use the interpreter to say exactly what you say in the client's language, *not* to explain. If the refugee has questions, they should be interpreted to you – not the interpreter.

**No Side Conversations:** No matter the circumstance, never have a side conversation. If one party (e.g. the refugee or alternatively, you and the provider) is left out of the conversation, then transparency (and trust/respect) is not maintained. Again, the interpreter should interpret everything that is being said. If a side conversation needs to take place, leave the room to demonstrate the conversation is private, do not exclude one party due to language ability.

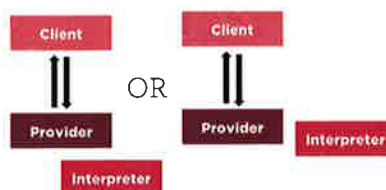
**How to Interject or Make a Comment:** If you missed a point or are confused, it's ok to interject. You may say: "Interpreter, could you repeat that?" If the refugee is speaking in long, complex sentences without a pause for the interpreter to interpret, it's ok to say: "Excuse me, can you pause and let her interpret so I don't miss anything?" This ensures smooth communication and comprehension.

**Positioning: suggestions for where to physically place interpreters/telephone:** If possible when using an in-person interpreter or when using a telephone to communicate with a refugee who is with you in the room, you should position the telephone or the interpreter to promote *direct communication* between you and the refugee (just like you would with a native English speaker).

- Triangle is **NOT** ideal for direction communication – client and provider start to look at interpreter, not at each other:



- The positioning on the left is best (to encourage provider and client to have direct communication with each other). The one on the right can be used if necessary.



- This is a good idea when using a phone (e.g. placing the phone on a chair between you, or on a table corner with you sitting across from refugee):





**HIAS**

**Welcome the stranger.  
Protect the refugee.**