

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on Refugee Resettlement Benefits

Q: What is the difference between State Department Benefits and HHS/ORR benefits? Why are they not part of the same package? Are they at all connected?

A: The State Department's Refugee Admissions Reception and Placement (R&P) Program and the Cash and Medical Assistance (CMA) Program of the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement (HHS/ORR) are two separate and distinct programs, administered by two different agencies of the U.S. Government. Recipients of Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) are given the option of enrolling in the State Department's R&P Program. This does not automatically enroll you in the HHS/ORR CMA Program. The HHS/ORR Program is administered by individual States, and individuals can apply upon arrival to the U.S.

Each SIV recipient approved for admission to the U.S. who wishes to participate in the Department of State's R&P Program will be sponsored by one of ten resettlement agencies participating in the R&P Program under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. State Department. The sponsoring agency is responsible for placing refugees with one of its affiliated offices and for providing initial services which include: housing, essential furnishings, food, necessary clothing, community orientation, and referral to other social, medical and employment services during the refugee's first 30 - 90 days in the United States. There are some 350 affiliated Reception and Placement offices across the United States.

HHS/ORR-funded benefits (RCA, RMA) are administered by States, and are available through State benefit-granting agencies. After arrival in the U.S., you may apply in the State in which you are living. If you are sponsored by one of the Department of State-funded resettlement agencies, they will guide you in applying for HHS/ORR-funded benefits in the State in which you are living. Otherwise, HHS/ORR will provide a contact in the State of residence who can assist you with information about where to apply for these benefits.

The HHS/ORR CMA Program provides reimbursement to States for 100 percent of Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA), and Unaccompanied Refugee Minors program services, as well as States' associated administrative costs of providing these benefits to refugees and other eligible persons. HHS/ORR also provides funding to States for a number of Social Services, including employment services, English language instruction, case management, translation and interpreter services, skills recertification, and other services. All

persons receiving RCA are required to participate in employment services. Persons who are not receiving RCA may also enroll in Refugee Social Services. [Click here](#) for more information about HHS/ORR and the CMA Program.

Q: Will I automatically receive HHS/ORR benefits upon arrival?

A: No, this application must be made by the individual upon arrival in the United States. For more information about Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement (HHS/ORR) and the Cash and Medical Assistance (CMA) Program, please visit the HHS/ORR website.

Q: When can I begin to make travel arrangements, sell property, and/or give up my job?

A: The applicant should NOT make any travel arrangements, sell property, or give up employment until notified by IOM that their case has been fully approved.

Q: What does the basic living assistance provide? Does this include housing and meals?

A: Resettlement agencies participating in the Reception and Placement program of the U.S. Department of State are required to provide basic needs support for the first month after arrival. This includes housing and food or a food allowance until other forms of assistance (public cash assistance and food stamps) can be accessed by the refugee.

Q: Is the basic living assistance provided for the first 30 days a loan?

A: The Reception and Placement Program of the U.S. Department of State provides a one-time grant of \$425 per person to the resettlement agency. This money is to be used to provide for basic needs during the first month of arrival. This money is not a loan and does not have to be paid back.

Q: What type of housing assistance is offered? Will I be required to live with other immigrants in the same building?

A: Housing varies from one location to another. In general, the housing provided is a modest apartment furnished with items that have been donated by other members of the local community. It is quite common for the apartment buildings in which refugees are placed to house a wide variety of people representing diverse races and ethnicities, cultures, religions, and backgrounds.

Q: What are the repayment conditions of the travel loan and what is the interest rate incurred?

A: After arriving in the United States, the recipient has 42 months to repay this interest-free loan. Repayment of the loan generally begins within six months after arrival. The recipient should repay the loan in monthly payments set forth in the loan note. The monthly payments should be sent to the voluntary agency designated on the loan note. The voluntary agency then reimburses IOM to make funds available for others seeking resettlement. Repaying the travel loan promptly contributes to the future of the travel loan program, helps refugees to establish a good credit rating in the United States, and avoids having the loan returned to IOM or the Department of State for further collection action.

Q: How long does it take to receive assistance from ORR upon arrival in the US?

A: Application processing times vary from State to State. All ORR benefits are accessed by applying for benefits in the State in which you are residing. ORR will provide a contact in your State of residence who can assist you with information about where to apply for ORR benefits.

Q: Can I apply for HHS/ORR benefits and services as soon as I arrive in the United States?

A: Yes. You should apply for HHS/ORR-funded benefits and services as soon as you arrive in the U.S. because your eligibility is time-limited by law.

Q: I would like to be resettled in a certain city or State. What should I do?

A: Although refugees can indicate a preference, unless the applicant is joining close family members, it may not always be possible to honor the applicant's resettlement location preference.

Q: How will I know which agency is responsible for providing services?

A: An individual's case will be assigned to a resettlement agency before arrival in the U.S. That agency will provide a sponsorship assurance which will be included in the approved refugee's documentation packet.

Q: If admitted, do I get U.S. citizenship? If so, how long does it take?

A: After 12 months of residency, refugees are required to apply for adjustment of status to that of permanent resident alien. After five years in the United States, refugees may apply for citizenship. Employment authorization documents are issued within a few weeks of arrival.

Q: Who are the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Agencies providing Reception and Placement services?

A: The following agencies provide Reception and Placement services:

[Church World Service \(CWS\)](#)

[Episcopal Migration Ministries \(EMM\)](#)

[Ethiopian Community Development Council \(ECDC\)](#)

[Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society \(HIAS\)](#)

Bureau of Refugee Programs

[Iowa Department of Human Services](#)

[International Rescue Committee \(IRC\)](#)

[Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Service \(LIRS\)](#)

[U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants \(USCRI\)](#)

[United States Conference of Catholic Bishops \(USCCB\)](#)

[World Relief \(WR\)](#)

Q: What does the Reception and Placement program offer that an American friend/colleague cannot?

A: Local resettlement agencies offer a great deal of experience and knowledge in assisting newcomers to adjust to their local communities. In many cases they are multi-service agencies that can assist clients in easily accessing local programs and resources. They are experienced in partnering with friends and relatives to support resettlement and aid clients as needed and appropriate. They can also serve as a safety net in providing additional support to newcomers should unforeseen circumstances make the burdens of assisting with resettlement too difficult.