

## **Migration and Refugee Services of Catholic Charities of Arlington Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Does the Diocese of Arlington provide assistance to refugees?**

Yes, mindful of the Gospel imperative to welcome the stranger, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington provides resettlement through its Migration and Refugee Services (CCDA/MRS). MRS has resettled refugees in Northern Virginia since 1975. Resettlement services have a goal of self-sufficiency through early employment. To achieve this goal, refugees receive a comprehensive set of services to help them rebuild their lives in the U.S.

### **What qualifies someone as a refugee?**

Refugees are individuals who have fled their countries of origin and who meet the United Nations' criteria of having a well-founded fear of persecution based on one of five protected grounds: race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Refugees have limited choice about their country of resettlement and often cannot return to their country of origin unless conditions change.

### **What services does the office provide and where can they be received?**

CCDA/MRS provides a comprehensive set of services and facilitates access to other services through an individual service plan and case management. Services include, and are not limited to, airport arrival; housing, furnishings, utilities; food and clothing; home visits; cultural orientation to life in the U.S., home, and community; interpretation and translation; health screening; assistance with applications for a Social Security card; employment services; assistance in accessing English language classes; assistance with application for Selective Service registration, as applicable; enrollment of children in school; and basic safety training.

### **How does a person become a refugee?**

The process for proving “refugee” status is often very difficult. The individual must first cross an international border to seek safety in another country, referred to as an asylum country. These migrants must then meet the refugee definition and requirements established by the government of that first asylum country (the nearby country to which the person goes when he or she escapes from his or her home country). If these criteria are met, the refugee is placed on a list of individuals eligible for resettlement. The countries that accept refugees for resettlement then examine these lists and determine if any of these individuals meet their own criteria for resettlement. This process can take a long time; even after a refugee is accepted as eligible for resettlement, there is often a very long wait for an available slot in the country that has accepted his or her application.

### **Who processes the refugee applications in the United States?**

The acceptance of individuals for resettlement in the United States is the responsibility of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Once DHS has approved a case for resettlement, responsibility passes to the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) of the Department of State. The State Department (a) oversees programs abroad to prepare refugees for their arrival in the U.S. and (b) manages the allocation of funds and placement of refugees with resettlement agencies within the U.S. Generally, the State Department contracts with national resettlement agencies to resettle refugees to ensure that immediate survival needs are met and to

provide services that will enable the refugees to achieve financial self-sufficiency as rapidly as possible. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Office of Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) is one such resettlement agency. CCDM/MRS works under USCCB/MRS to resettle refugees in Northern Virginia.

**Are refugees screened before being sent to Northern Virginia?**

Yes. The current refugee crisis presents a challenge of balancing a legitimate concern for national security with Christ's call to welcome the stranger; the United States can continue to welcome refugees while continuing to ensure our own safety. The Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Department of Defense, and multiple intelligence agencies conduct rigorous security screenings, including biometric checks, forensic testing, medical screenings, and in-person interviews. This vetting process can take as long as two years, and is critical in determining that the refugees seeking to come to the United States are in serious, often life-threatening danger, and that they meet criteria for entry.

**Does the office currently service refugees from Syria?**

MRS provides services to refugees, asylees, Special Immigrant Visa (SIVs) holders, Cuban/Haitian Entrants, and survivors of human trafficking of all races, nationalities, and creeds. In the past year, MRS resettled refugees from 26 countries. MRS only resettles refugees who have a U.S. tie (family member or friend) in Northern Virginia. We will continue to provide services to eligible refugees in partnership with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Department of State, the Department of Homeland Security and the Virginia Office of Newcomer Services.