

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE SPONSORSHIP OF REFUGEE STUDENTS?

University/college sponsorship of refugee students is an education pathway for refugee students to be admitted as a student into a U.S. higher education institution (HEI) and as a refugee into the U.S. As part of sponsoring the student, the HEI commits to providing financial and logistical support for the student. Funding may come from an individual campus or other private sources or public-private partnerships.

WHY IS THIS PROGRAM NEEDED?

Globally, only 5% of refugees access higher education. Historically, a refugee student currently outside the United States would need to apply for admission to a U.S. institution as an international student (using the F-1 visa process). Based on the context and reality for refugee students, this process is often inaccessible. Consequently, refugee students face many barriers to enrollment: less than 1% of refugees are resettled globally. Adding pathways, including through education, expands opportunities for resettlement.

WHO IS A REFUGEE STUDENT?

A refugee is someone unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. A refugee student for the purposes of this program is someone interested in enrolling in higher education.

WHO CAN SPONSOR A REFUGEE STUDENT?

Any higher education institution who is willing and able to commit to the responsibilities of a sponsoring HEI is eligible to sponsor a refugee student.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SCHOLARSHIP AND SPONSORSHIP?

A scholarship provides financial support for a refugee student to attend a college or university but does NOT provide a guarantee of a visa to enter the U.S. or an immigration pathway to remain in the U.S. following their completion of studies.

A sponsorship is a commitment to support a refugee students' education and provide integration support throughout the duration of their time on campus. Sponsorship provides a resettlement opportunity for refugee students and they arrive in the U.S. as a refugee with a pathway to legal permanent residence and citizenship.

DOES THIS PROGRAM ALREADY EXIST?

There is no current model or existing program in the United States. University/college sponsorship of refugee students is a new model for refugee students to be admitted as a student into a U.S. higher ed institution and as a refugee into the U.S.

UNDER THIS PROGRAM, WHAT IMMIGRATION PATHWAY WOULD STUDENTS GO THROUGH?

Students would go through the existing U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). They would arrive in the U.S. with refugee status and be eligible to apply for permanent legal status after one year and citizenship after five years.

HOW IS A REFUGEE STUDENT REFERRED TO THE PROGRAM?

A formal referral is not required to participate in the program. Refugee students can self-identify and apply for the program. Outreach and recruitment efforts will also happen through local NGOs and community-based organizations, who can refer refugee students to the program.

WHAT CRITERIA WILL THE IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION USE TO DETERMINE WHETHER STUDENTS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR THIS PROPOSED PROGRAM?

The implementing organization will consider students who:

1. Would be considered refugees under U.S. law – to be accepted into the program and ultimately travel to study in the U.S. will need to meet the U.S. definition of a refugee. Generally speaking, refugees are people outside of their country who are unable or unwilling to return home because they fear serious harm.
2. Possess academic potential to succeed at a U.S. college or university - students will need to demonstrate that they have the requisite academic skills for a U.S. college or university, including an advanced level of English.

Additionally, in the program's initial years, students will need to reside in a country where the program operates. While ultimately the program should be open to any refugee student anywhere in the world, at first, it will only be available in specific locations.

IF A STUDENT HAS NOT YET BEEN OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED AS A REFUGEE OVERSEAS, WILL THEY STILL BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE PROPOSED PROGRAM?

Yes. Any person in need of international protection deemed likely to meet the U.S. refugee definition can be considered for this program, including asylum-seekers. A formal confirmation of refugee status will not be a prerequisite. Ultimately, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) will determine whether or not the applicant is a refugee under US law.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE FROM THE TIME A STUDENT APPLIES TO THE PROPOSED PROGRAM AND THE TIME THEY WOULD TRAVEL TO THE U.S. AND START CLASSES IF THEY ARE ACCEPTED?

That will depend on several factors, but we estimate it could take up to 20 months between the time students apply to the time they travel to the U.S. The refugee resettlement process is lengthy and requires applicants to undergo security clearances and multiple interviews.

HOW WILL REFUGEE STUDENTS BE MATCHED WITH A COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY?

The implementing organization will first compile all profiles of accepted students and all admission criteria from the sponsoring HEI. The sponsoring HEI will be sent the profiles of students that meet admission criteria for their institutions' review and ranking. Students will also be able to express and rank their preferred colleges and universities.

WHO WILL MAKE THE FINAL ADMISSIONS DECISION?

The final admission decision lies with each participating HEI. While the IO will manage the application and initial selection process, the IO will work closely with participating institutions to identify the best match for their campuses. The IO will commit to securing a placement for each student it admits into the program.

WHO FUNDS THIS PROGRAM? WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP?

University sponsorship of refugee students is a public-private partnership. Public-private partnerships involve collaboration between a government agency and the private sector to finance, build, and operate projects. The Implementing Organization will receive some funding support from the Department of State to coordinate the implementation of the private sponsorship program and will also solicit funds from individuals, corporate, and foundation supporters. Sponsoring HEI will commit to be responsible for the financial support for the refugee student. Those financial supports are not required to come directly from the HEI and the HEI is welcome and encouraged to solicit additional funding from the broader campus community and local funders.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS AFTER THEIR ARRIVAL TO THE US?

HEI Sponsors will be expected to carry out services within the first 90 days of arrival, similar to those carried out by Resettlement Agencies under the traditional Reception & Placement (R&P) program (e.g., airport pickup), with some exceptions and services adapted to the situation of a college student. The HEI Sponsor should also have a plan to ensure that the student's integration and psychosocial needs are met for the duration of the student's studies.

HOW SHOULD RECEPTION AND INTEGRATION SERVICES FOR STUDENTS BE IMPLEMENTED?

The HEI Sponsor should establish a welcoming committee on campus that is composed of a wide array of campus champions (e.g., peers, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni), local partners, local community members or representatives from local non-profits (such as churches) who can provide regular and iterative sponsorship services within the first three months of arrival and beyond. This welcoming committee will likely look different on each campus but can be composed of a variety of stakeholders on and off-campus, including student, faculty, and/or staff champions, as well as local partners including resettlement agencies, churches, businesses, and other community groups.

WHAT TYPES OF DEGREES CAN A REFUGEE STUDENT ACCESS THROUGH THIS PROGRAM?

Refugee students with interest in any degree program are welcome to apply to the program, but availability of certain degree programs may be limited based on the Sponsoring HEI. The initial focus of the program will be for Bachelor's degrees through four year or two plus two programs.