Journey Map

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program from the Perspective of a Refugee

This map reflects the typical experience for a UNHCR-referred refugee; the steps vary, particularly during processing, for some refugee populations.

Seek Refuge

- Flees homeland
- Registers with UNHCR
- Embarks on dangerous journey to host country
- UNHCR refugee status determination (RSD) and resettlement interview

Apply for Refugee Resettlement

- ADDITIONAL TASKS: Collect important documents & belongings, Endure arduous physical journey over land/sea, Negotiate life in a foreign country, Identify how to register with UNHCR & access refugee services
- ADDITIONAL TASKS: Travel to interviews, Asked to tell & retell detailed account of reason for fleeing, Asked to repeatedly provide legal documents, Asked to provide fingerprints, Asked whether they have U.S. tie

Prepare for Departure

- ADDITIONAL TASKS: Sell possessions, Take kids out of school
- PAIN POINTS: Fear and uncertainty, Separation from family members not included in this case file, Don't know final U.S. destination, Travel at very short notice, Last minute travel cancellations and rescheduling, even after possessions have been sold

Resettle in the U.S.

- Required resettlement activities: Registers for social services, Attends cultural orientation, Attends ESOL classes, Goes to medical appointments, Looks for a job
- ADDITIONAL TASKS: Get a Social Security card, Learn English, Adjust to a new town or city, Learn to navigate public transportation, Sign kids up for school
- PAIN POINTS: Difficulty learning English, Lack of access to transportation in rural areas, Struggle to make ends meet with low-wage employment, Social isolation: lack of community, friends, mentors, Lack of recognition for academic credentials or professional certifications

Sources: Public websites of relevant agencies and interviews with twelve refugees, including two Special Immigrant Visa recipients.