

# Arriving Populations:

## Understanding Immigration Status and Available Resources

The United States is a major destination for people seeking protection from persecution and violence, as well as those seeking economic opportunities. In recent years, there has been an increase in the type and volume of arriving populations coming to the United States, both at borders and in the interior. Below is a Frequently Asked Question guide (FAQ) on recent refugee, asylum-seeker, and parolee arrivals.

### Refugees

#### Who is a refugee?

[Refugees](#) are individuals who have fled their home country due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

#### Do refugees arrive from the U.S./Mexico border?

No. Refugees apply for protection through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or directly at U.S. embassies while still outside the United States. They are the [most vetted](#) arriving population that comes to the United States.

#### Where are refugees resettled once they arrive to the United States?

Refugees are resettled in communities nationally, with support from resettlement agencies like Global Refuge and community-based affiliates. Some states consistently resettle higher numbers of refugees due to more established infrastructure and support systems. For example, in [Fiscal Year 2023](#), the leading states for initial refugee resettlement were California, Texas, and New York.

#### How many refugees were resettled in the United States in Fiscal Year 2024?

In the fiscal year ending September 30, the United States resettled approximately 100,034 refugees.

#### How many refugees will the United States resettle in Fiscal Year 2025?

Each fiscal year, the President, consulting Congress, sets a refugee admissions goal. For 2025, the refugee admissions goal is 125,000.

### Asylum Seekers

#### Who is an asylum seeker?

An [asylum seeker](#) is someone who flees their home country and seeks refuge outside of their home country due to persecution based on race, religion, ethnicity, social group, gender, or political opinion.

#### How do asylum seekers apply for protection in the United States?

Asylum seekers apply for protection either [affirmatively](#) with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) or [defensively](#) if an individual is facing removal proceedings after presenting themselves at a port of entry along the U.S. border.

#### What is the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee?

Refugees apply for protection outside of the United States and are normally referred by UNHCR. After extensive vetting, they then are referred to nonprofit agencies to be resettled. U.S. law requires asylum seekers to file for protection while physically present in the United States or at a land border. They may have arrived in the United States on a visa or other legal pathway, or they can apply defensively once they are in removal proceedings in the United States.

## Parolees

### What is parole?

Parole is not an immigration status, but a discretionary authority granted by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to allow certain individuals to enter or remain in the United States temporarily for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit. The statutory basis for parole is §212(d)(5)(A) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). The [2008 Parole Memo](#) provides guidance on specific criteria.

### How do parolees apply for protection?

Parole requests are typically made to USCIS, but they can be issued by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The decision to issue parole is discretionary and reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

### What are special parole programs?

In addition to the standard parole procedure, there are special parole programs tailored to address the circumstances of specific populations. For example, parole was used in the 1970s to admit people displaced following the Vietnam War. Recently, it's been used in the Afghan evacuation and the response to the war in Ukraine. Nonetheless, parole decisions are still to be made on a case-by-case basis.

### What is the CHNV Parole Program?

The [Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela \(CHNV\) parole program](#) provides a legal pathway for nationals from the four countries to enter and temporarily stay in the United States for up to two years under humanitarian or significant public benefit parole grounds. Qualified nationals abroad and their immediate family members also need a U.S. tie or sponsor who promises to support them in the United States.

### Why Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela?

All four Western Hemisphere countries face dire political and economic circumstances and instability.

## Arriving Populations and Eligibility for Benefits

### Are refugees eligible for benefits?

Yes. Refugees are eligible to receive federal public benefits such as cash assistance through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI), health insurance through Medicaid, and food assistance through Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Refugees also may receive employment assistance, case management, and language training.

### Are asylum seekers eligible for benefits?

No. Despite also experiencing persecution, asylum seekers are generally not eligible for federal public benefits. Additionally, they must wait 150 days after submitting a complete asylum application to apply for a work permit and at least another 30 days for it to be granted. Once granted asylum, becoming an [asylee](#), they may be eligible for Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)-funded assistance and federal public benefits.

### Are parolees eligible for benefits?

No. Parolees are generally ineligible for benefits without specific Congressional authorization. However, they may apply for a work permit, allowing them to work legally in the United States.

### Are certain parolees eligible for benefits?

Yes. Certain parolees are eligible for benefits only with Congressional authorization.

- (1) [Afghan and Ukrainian parolees](#)- Congress has authorized [Ukrainian humanitarian parolees](#) to receive ORR-funded assistance and federal public benefits if they arrived between February 24, 2022, and September 30, 2024. [Afghans](#) paroled in the United States between July 31, 2021, and September 30, 2023, are also eligible for these benefits.
- (2) [Cuban and Haitian Entrants](#)- The [Cuban/Haitian Entrant Program](#) (CHEP) provides eligible Cubans and Haitians paroled into the United States ORR-funded assistance and access to federal public benefits.