

Working with Refugees in Omaha  
**www.omaharefugees.com**

Globally, 20 people are forcibly displaced every minute
It is estimated that 1 in 20 people in Omaha have refugee origins
Nebraska resettled more refugees than any other state in fiscal year 2017
Omaha Public Schools serves families speaking 119 different primary languages

**Terminology**

<b>Immigrant</b>	Person who moves to another country permanently
<b>Migrant</b>	Person who moves frequently or has moved recently; usually for economic reasons
<b>Refugee</b>	Person who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.
<b>Asylum Status</b>	A form of protection available to people who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meet the definition of refugee</li> <li>- Are already in the United States, or</li> <li>- Are seeking admission at a port of entry</li> </ul>
<b>Special Immigrant Visa (SIV)</b>	Person who worked with the U.S. Armed Forces or under Chief of Mission authority as a translator or interpreter in Iraq or Afghanistan

Life in Refugee Camps

- Average stay in a refugee camp globally is **20 years**; many people are born and raised in camps
- Being born in a refugee camp does **not** make someone a citizen of that host country
- Often fenced and patrolled; refugees may not travel freely in host country
- Limited access to employment, education, and healthcare

Resettlement

- **Less than 1%** of refugees will qualify for resettlement; most strictly vetted route of immigration
- Assigned a resettlement location by United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)
- Resettled refugees in the U.S. receive a **one-time** payment (\$925 per individual) given to the resettlement agency to spend on the refugee’s behalf (housing deposits, etc.)
- Resettlement is a federal program; casework assistance ends after 90 days
- In Omaha, the average refugee family has someone working full-time within 90-120 days
- Refugees are employment authorized and eligible for same assistance programs as U.S. citizens
  - DHHS, SSI, FAFSA, etc.
- After 5 years in the U.S. a refugee may apply for citizenship

**Naming traditions** often don’t follow the American standard of first, middle, family name. Some cultures use only one individual name, based upon personal characteristics or the time of birth, which gets broken up by syllables during the resettlement process to fit into U.S. systems. In many cultures women do not change their name when they marry. Some cultures refer to people by kinship or “call names” rather than their legal names. Due to differences in alphabets, spellings of names may also vary. Ask people what they would prefer to be called, and do your best to pronounce names correctly.

Name Pronunciation  
 Vowels are most commonly pronounced:  
**A = Ah** (as in 'awesome')  
**E = Eh** (as in 'egg')  
**I = Ee** (as in 'ski')  
**O = Oh** (as in 'only')

**January 1<sup>st</sup> birthdays:** Some people come from countries with different calendars, home births, or lack of government birth certificates. If the exact date of birth is unavailable, **refugees** will be assigned January 1<sup>st</sup> as their date of birth during the immigration process.

Local Contacts and Resources

Omaha Refugee Service Agencies

**Refugee Empowerment Center:** Marilyn Sims (402) 554-0759

**Lutheran Family Services refugee programs coordinator:** Emily Sutton (402) 536-3500

Refugee and Immigrant Social Services (for those in country post 90 days)

**International Center of the Heartland:** Dekow Sagar (402) 536-3521

DHHS

**State Refugee Coordinator:** Karen Parde (402) 471-9264

**State Refugee Health Coordinator:** Kristin Gall (402) 471-1372

**Economic Assistance Refugee Unit:** Barbara Anderson (402) 595-3323

Education

**Omaha Public Schools** English Learner programs coordinator: Jaimie Cogua (531) 299-9405

**Omaha Public Schools** refugee specialist: Alana Schriver (531) 299-9580

**Omaha Public Schools** bilingual liaison coordinator: Javier Rodriguez-Torres (531) 299-9576

**Migrant Education:** Suzanne Hult (531) 299-9582

**Millard Public Schools** Coordinator of Special Programs: Kara Hutton (402) 715-8708

**Westside Community Schools** ELL Coordinator: Hillary Haddix (402) 343-2778

(Preschool) **Ready in 5:** Tatyana Kolesnikova (402) 457-7771 Heartland Family Service

**Adult ESL:** <https://omahalibrary.org/english-as-a-second-language-esl-providers-directory/>

Health Education (for refugees or healthcare professionals working with refugees)

**Eastern Nebraska Refugee Health Liaison:** Michaela Dei (402) 616-8551

Omaha Police Department Refugee Liaison

**Crime Prevention Specialist:** Lauren Genier (402) 444-6224

Domestic Violence Casework Specialist

**International Center of the Heartland:** Rachel Wells (402) 318-8683

Refugee Juvenile Justice Advocacy

**Heartland Family Service:** Elizabeth Ajongo (402) 301-0904

Immigration

**Nebraska Immigration Legal Assistance Hotline:** 855-307-6730 Mon-Thurs 9-11am & 1:30-3:30pm

**Citizenship Classes:** <https://omahalibrary.org/citizenship-classes-directory/>

Recommended Self-Education

