



**DEPARTMENT OF  
HUMAN SERVICES**

# Understanding the Refugee Process

Kristine Bjerkaas Friesen  
Resettlement Programs Office

# Overview

What makes someone a refugee?

The US Refugee Admissions Program

People with Refugee Status in MN

State Role in Refugee Resettlement

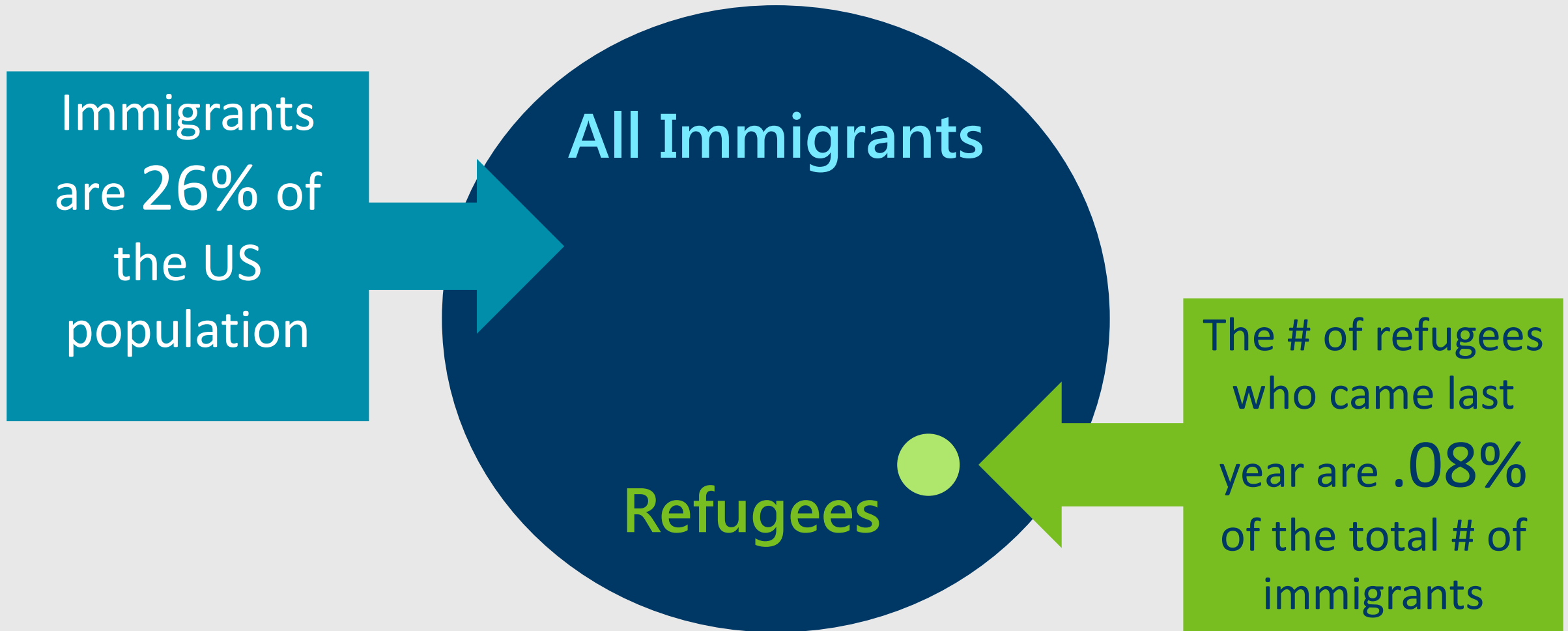
Resources

What do you think of when you  
hear the word “HOME” ?



Who is a refugee?

# Not All Immigrants are Refugees



# Definition of Refugee

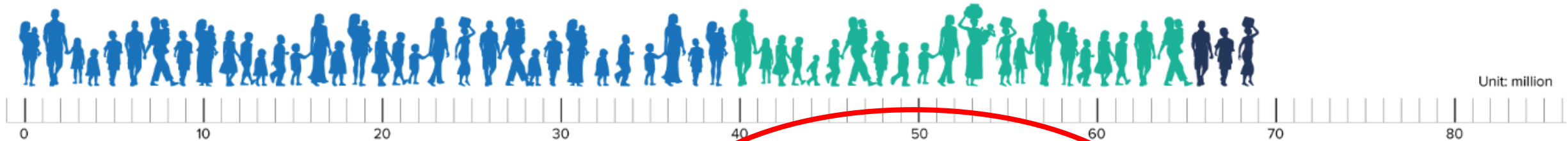


A person who has been forced to flee his/her homeland and is unable to return because she or he has experienced persecution or has a well-founded fear of persecution.

25.4 million refugees worldwide

# Global Refugee Crisis

**68.5 million** forcibly displaced people worldwide



Internally Displaced People

**40 million**

Refugees

**25.4 million**

19.9 million under UNHCR mandate

5.4 million Palestinian refugees registered by UNRWA

Asylum-seekers

**3.1 million**

**10 million**  
stateless people



**102,800**  
Refugees resettled

**44,400** people  
a day forced to flee their homes because of  
conflict and persecution



# Persecution Based On

- Race
- Religion
- Nationality
- Membership in a particular social group
- Political opinion





# Persecuted Means:

Jailed and tortured because of how you worship

Your family is threatened with violence because of political comments you made to your neighbors or on social media

People around you are mysteriously disappearing because it is illegal to speak your ethnic language or practice your religion

You are intentionally not given work opportunities and your kids are excluded at school or not allowed to go to school because of your cultural background

Armed militia come into your town and take the women for sexual slavery and you are afraid for the future of your young daughters

What important  
things define who  
you are?

# To Be A Refugee Means.....

...critical pieces of your life are ripped away:

Home

Family

- Separation or Death
- Traditional Roles

Native Language  
& Ability to  
Communicate

Education

Profession &  
Status

Culture &  
Traditions

Sense of  
Community

Religious  
Practices

# The refugee journey begins

**Flight from your home**

Cross a national border  
into a country of asylum

Appeal to UNHCR for refugee status





“...The root problems are war and hatred,  
not people who flee;  
Refugees are among the first victims of  
terrorism.”

— *UN Secretary-General, António Guterres*

# Life in a Refugee Camp

- From Flight to Waiting
- Stuck in limbo – indefinite detention
- Competition for Basic Needs: Food, Water, Shelter
- Continuing Political & Ethnic Hostilities
- Violence & Disease
- Limited access to Education, Health Care, Employment





# Refugee Reality

Refugees often stay in protracted refugee situations for years, decades, or even generations. 9 million+ “warehoused” over 10 years



*Less than 1% are permanently resettled anywhere in the world*





# Top refugee-hosting countries

Where the world's displaced people are being hosted

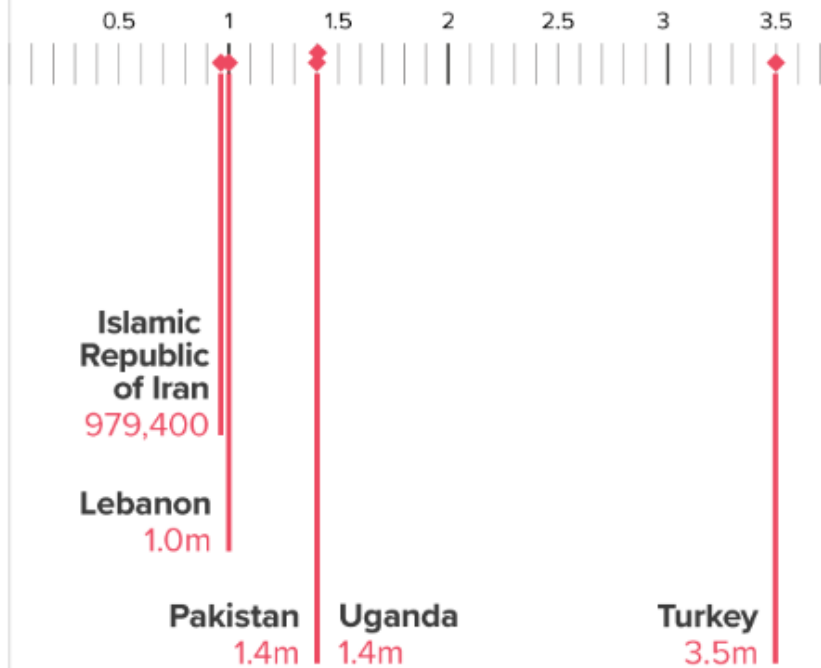


85 per cent of the world's displaced people are in developing countries

**57%** of refugees worldwide came from three countries



**Top refugee-hosting countries**





# Kakuma Camp (Kenya)



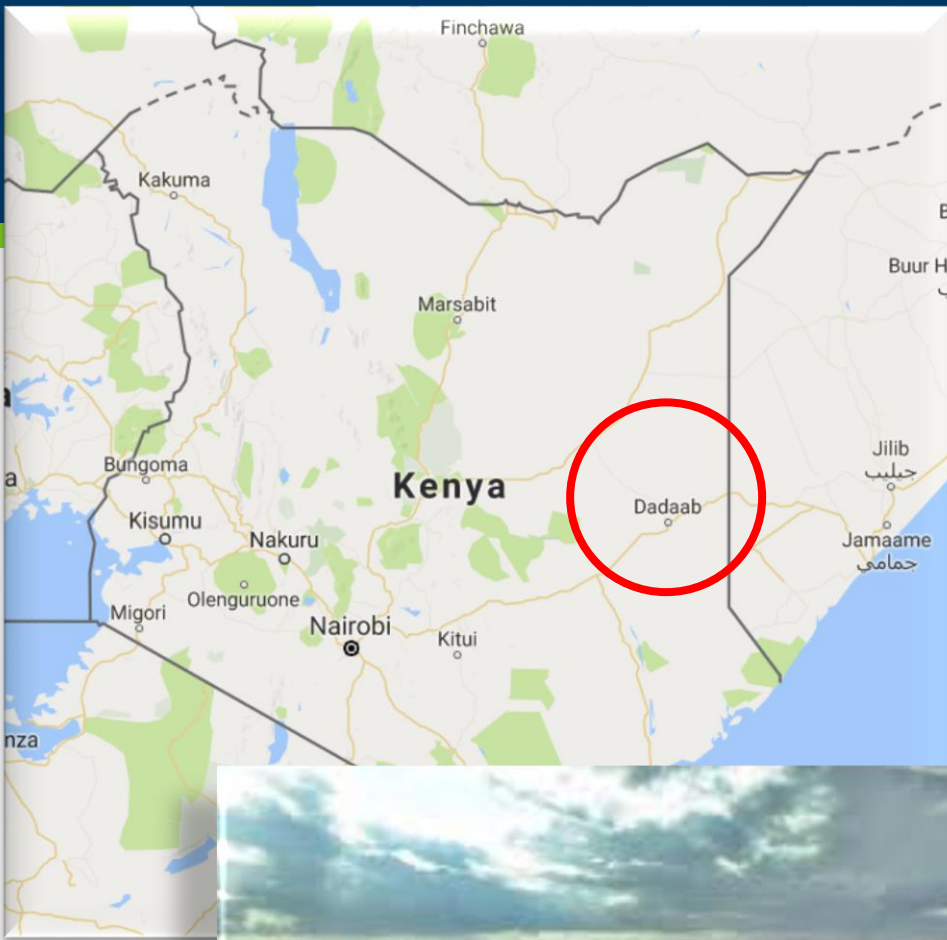
“Living in a hostile environment, you don’t get to think about the future because you are dealing with just meeting your daily needs of food, health, and safety. It is a very oppressive way of life.”



*-Pierre Gatera, who came to Minnesota as a refugee from Rwanda through Burundi to Nairobi to Kakuma refugee camp*



# Dadaab Camp (Kenya)





# Mae La Camp (Thailand)







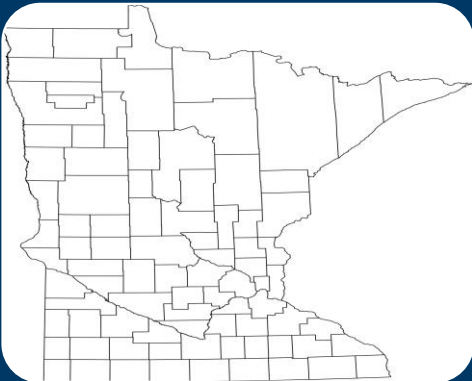
A HUMANITARIAN and PROTECTION program of the US Department of State

# U.S. Refugees Admissions Program

# Why resettle refugees?



“The United States is proud of its **history of welcoming** immigrants and **refugees**. The U.S. refugee resettlement program reflects the United States’ highest values and aspirations to **compassion, generosity and leadership**.” (*us Department of State website*)



**In Minnesota**, refugees provide a **story of resilience and hope** for our **community**. People with refugee status have experienced extreme loss and had to start their lives and careers over again with little more than courage and determination. These same individuals are now legislators, school board members, teachers, state workers, nurses, factory workers and business owners. **Their tenacity strengthens the future of MN.**

# U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

## Annual Presidential Determination signed each year sets:

- Maximum number of refugees admitted to US
- Priority populations to resettle in the coming year
- Nationalities eligible for family reunification programs

### 2017 Proposed Admissions

Africa . . . . .	35,000
East Asia . . . . .	12,000
Europe and Central Asia . . . . .	4,000
Latin America/Caribbean. . . . .	5,000
Near East/South Asia. . . . .	40,000
Unallocated Reserve . . . . .	14,000

**TOTAL.....110,000**

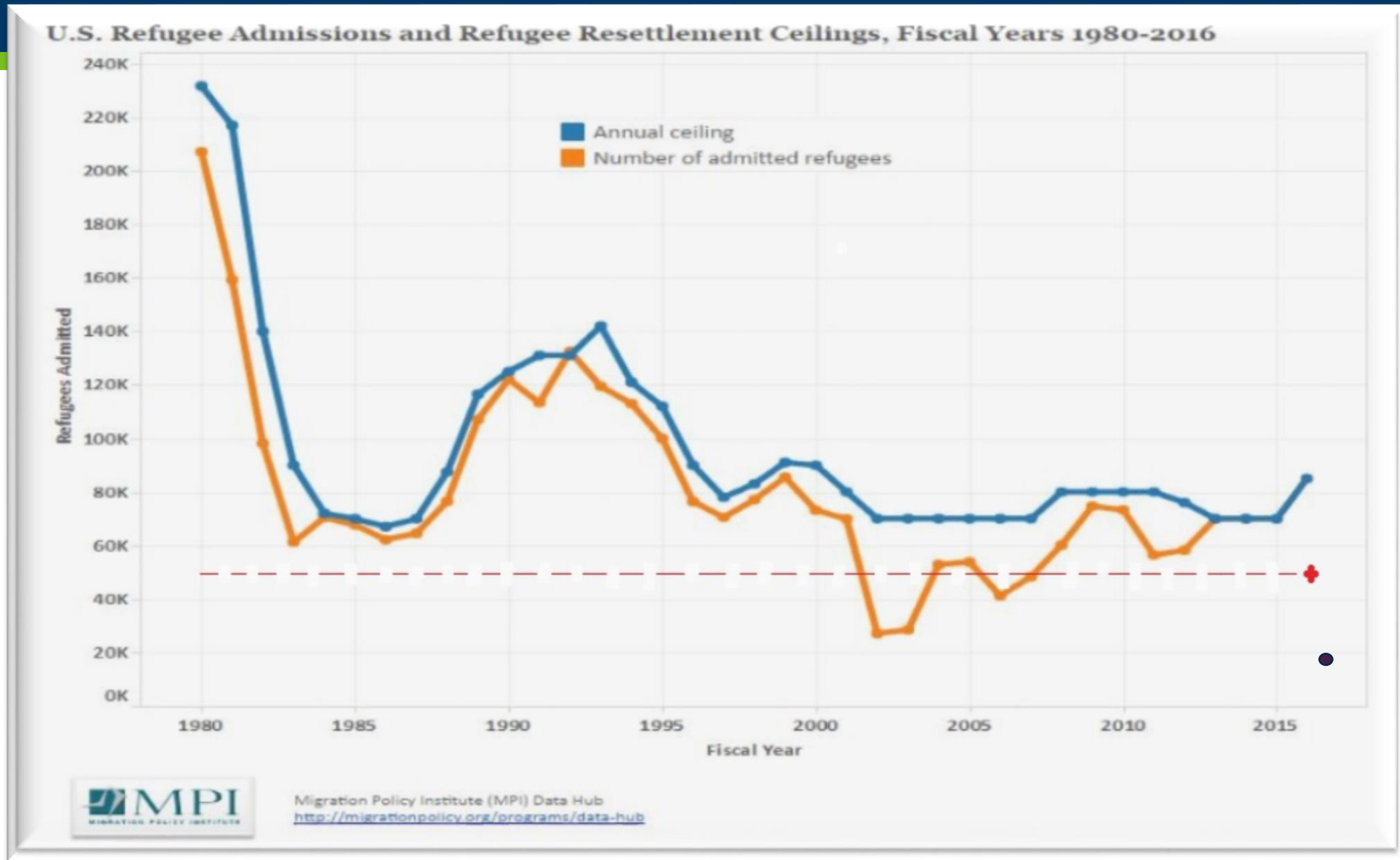
**ACTUAL arrivals.....53,716**

### 2018 Proposed Admissions

Africa . . . . .	19,000
East Asia . . . . .	5,000
Europe and Central Asia . . . . .	2,000
Latin America/Caribbean. . . . .	1,500
Near East/South Asia. . . . .	17,000
Unallocated Reserve . . . . .	.0

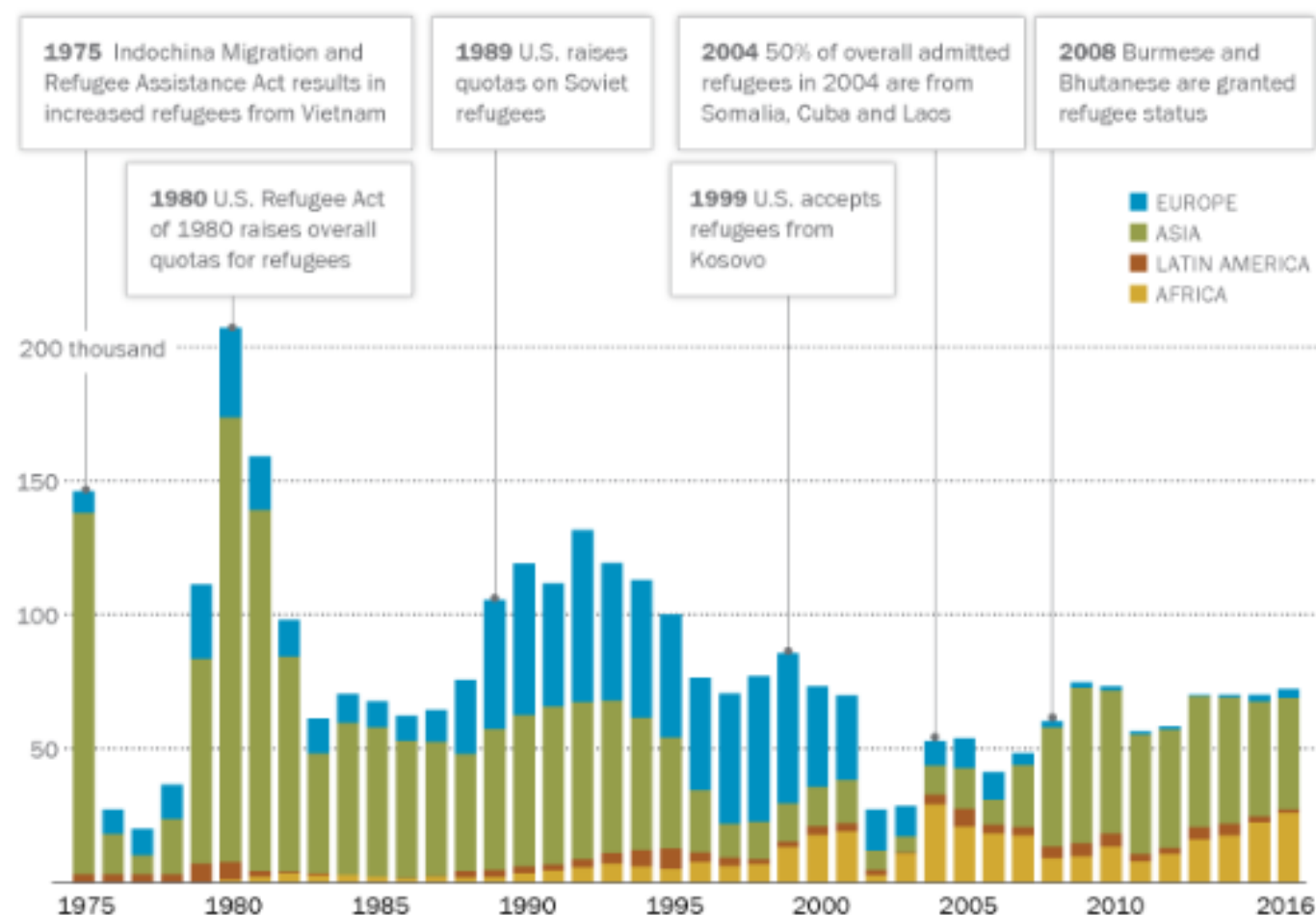
**TOTAL.....45,000**

# Arrivals Ceilings 1980-2016



## The shifting origins of refugees to the U.S. over time

*Number of refugees admitted to the U.S., by region of origin of principal applicant and fiscal year*



Note: Data do not include special immigrant visas and certain humanitarian parole entrants. Europe includes Russia. Asia includes Middle Eastern and North African countries. Africa includes sub-Saharan Africa, but also Sudan and South Sudan. Latin America includes Caribbean. Data for fiscal 2016 are through Aug. 31, 2016; fiscal year ends Sept. 30.

Source: Refugee Processing Center, 1975-2016.

# Vetting Process

Refugees are subject to the highest level of security checks of any U.S. entrant, facing a MINIMUM 18- to 24-month processing period.

*“U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is deeply committed to safeguarding the American public from threats to public safety and national security, just as we are committed to providing refuge to some of the world’s most vulnerable people. We do not believe these goals are mutually exclusive, or that either has to be pursued at the expense of the other.”*

No category of people or ethnicity or culture is inherently bad or criminal, that is an ill-founded fear.



Security is a central component of the US Refugee Admissions program and there are extensive security processes in place along with 8 federal intelligence agencies involved in the security process.



No person who has a criminal history associated with groups that the US considers dangerous is afforded protection under refugee status.



# Refugee Security Process

The  
vetting  
procedure  
involves

- Department of Homeland Security
- Department of State
- Department of Justice
- Department of Defense
- National Counterterrorism Center
- Department of Health and Human Services
- FBI
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection

# Refugee Security Process

The  
vetting  
procedure  
includes

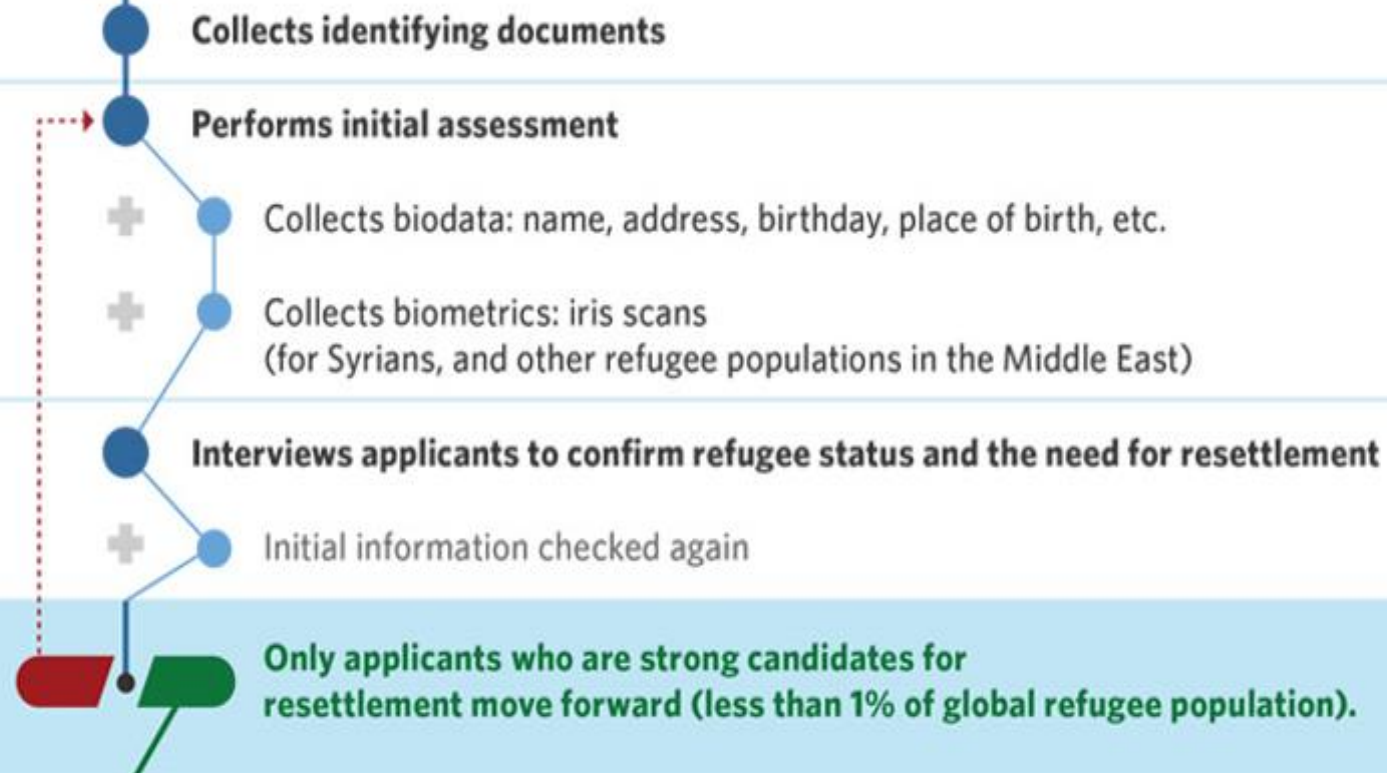
- 6 different security databases
- 5 separate background checks
- 4 biometric security checks
- 3 separate in-person interviews
- 2 interagency security reviews

## THE SCREENING PROCESS

# FOR REFUGEE ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES

1

MANY REFUGEE APPLICANTS IDENTIFY THEMSELVES TO THE U.N. REFUGEE AGENCY, UNHCR. UNHCR, THEN:



**2**

**APPLICANTS ARE RECEIVED BY A FEDERALLY-FUNDED  
RESETTLEMENT SUPPORT CENTER (RSC):**

**Collects identifying documents**

**Creates an applicant file**

**Compiles information to conduct biographic security checks**

### 3

#### BIOGRAPHIC SECURITY CHECKS START WITH ENHANCED INTERAGENCY SECURITY CHECKS:

**REFUGEES ARE SUBJECT TO THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF SECURITY CHECKS** of any category of traveler to the United States.

U.S. security agencies screen the candidate, including:

- + National Counterterrorism Center/ Intelligence Community
- + FBI
- + Department of Homeland Security
- + State Department

The screening looks for indicators, like:

- + Information that the individual is a security risk
- + Connections to known bad actors
- + Outstanding warrants/immigration or criminal violations

*DHS conducts an enhanced review of Syrian cases, which may be referred to USCIS Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate for review. Research that is used by the interviewing officer informs lines of question related to the applicant's eligibility and credibility.*

**This process is repeated any time new information is provided, such as a previously used name or different phone number. Otherwise, the process continues.**



# 4

## DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS)/USCIS INTERVIEW:

Interviews are conducted by USCIS Officers specially trained for interviews

Fingerprints are collected and submitted (biometric check)

Re-interviews can be conducted if fingerprint results or new information raises questions. If new biographic information is identified by USCIS at an interview, additional security checks on the information are conducted. USCIS may place a case on hold to do additional research or investigation. Otherwise, the process continues.





“The questions were very detailed: about my friends and family and how I spent my time. The interviewers even knew the location of the hospital where I was born. We were exhaustively, endlessly vetted. I was stunned by the level of scrutiny and the length of the process.”

-Linda from Baltimore  
Excerpt from Washington Post article





# 5

## BIOMETRIC SECURITY CHECKS:

● Applicant's fingerprints are taken by U.S. government employees



● Fingerprints are screened against the FBI's biometric database



● Fingerprints are screened against the DHS biometric database, containing watch-list information and previous immigration encounters in the U.S. and overseas.



● Fingerprints are screened against the U.S. Department of Defense biometric database, which includes fingerprint records captured in Iraq and other locations.



**IF NOT ALREADY HALTED, THIS IS THE END POINT FOR CASES WITH SECURITY CONCERNS.**

**Otherwise, the process continues.**



6

## MEDICAL CHECK:



The need for medical screening is determined

X



**THIS IS THE END POINT FOR CASES DENIED  
DUE TO MEDICAL REASONS.**

Refugees may be provided medical treatment  
for communicable diseases such as tuberculosis.



# 7

## CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND ASSIGNMENT TO DOMESTIC RESETTLEMENT LOCATIONS:

- Applicants complete cultural orientation classes.
- An assessment is made by a U.S.-based non-governmental organization to determine the best resettlement location for the candidate(s). Considerations include:
  - + ● Family; candidates with family in a certain area may be placed in that area.
  - + ● Health; a candidate with asthma may be matched to certain regions.
- A location is chosen.

### RECURRENT VETTING:

- Throughout this process, pending applications continue to be checked against terrorist databases, to ensure new, relevant terrorism information has not come to light. If a match is found, that case is paused for further review.

**IF THERE IS DOUBT**  
about whether  
an applicant poses  
a security risk, they  
will not be admitted.

x

● Applicants who continue to have no flags continue the process.



# 8

## TRAVEL:

International Organization for Migration books travel

Prior to entry in the United States, applicants are subject to:

+ Screening from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center-Passenger

+ The Transportation Security Administration's Secure Flight Program

x

**THIS IS THE END POINT FOR SOME APPLICANTS.**  
Applicants who have no flags continue the process.



9

## U.S. ARRIVAL:

All refugees are required to apply for a green card within a year of their arrival to the United States, which triggers:



Another set of security procedures with the U.S. government.



**REFUGEES ARE WOVEN INTO THE RICH FABRIC OF AMERICAN SOCIETY!**





# Refugees in Minnesota



# Refugee Status in the US

- Legal Immigration status granted prior to arrival
- Status valid indefinitely
- Work authorized upon arrival
- Path to citizenship (5 years)
- Access to public benefits if meet eligibility criteria



# Reception and Placement Services

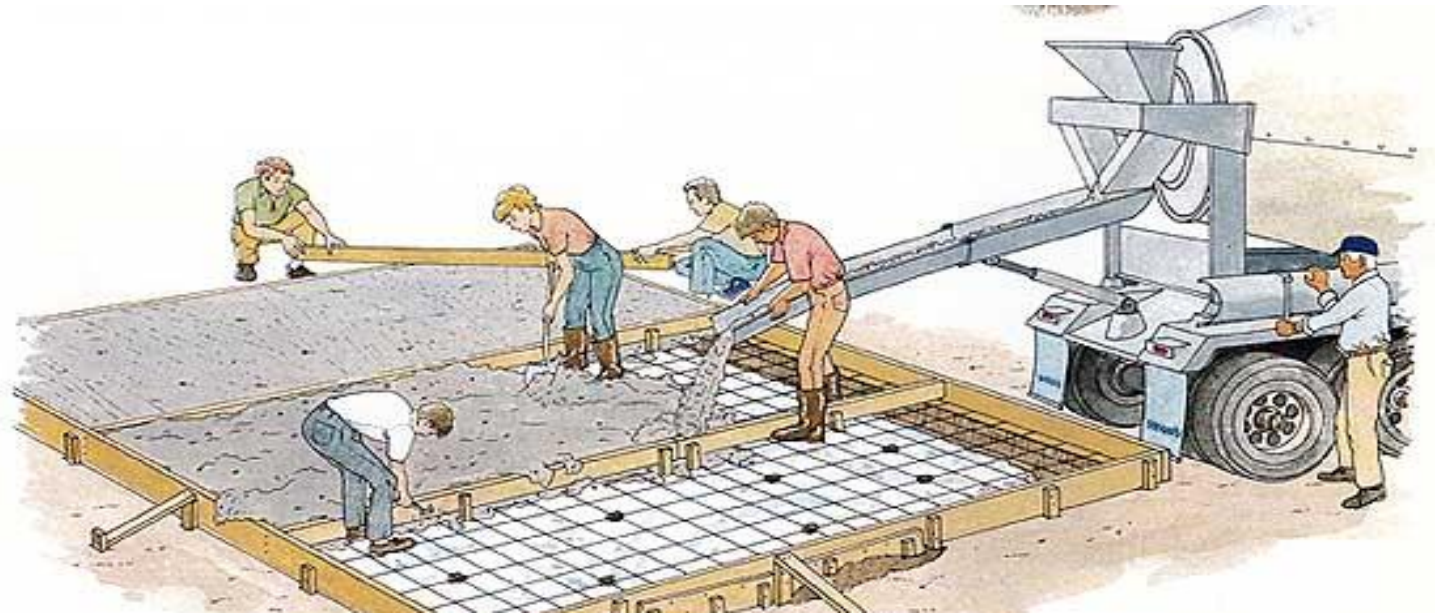
## MN's 5 Local Resettlement Agencies:

- Arrive Ministries – Richfield
- Catholic Charities- Rochester
- International Institute of MN – St. Paul
- Lutheran Social Services - Minneapolis, St. Cloud
- MN Council of Churches - Minneapolis

# How Resettlement in MN works: Building wellbeing for refugees

## Reception and Placement Services:

- 30-90 Days Case Management with resettlement agencies
- Connection to Ongoing Services
- One-time Grant to help with Initial Expenses (\$1125/person)
- Begin Travel Loan Repayment



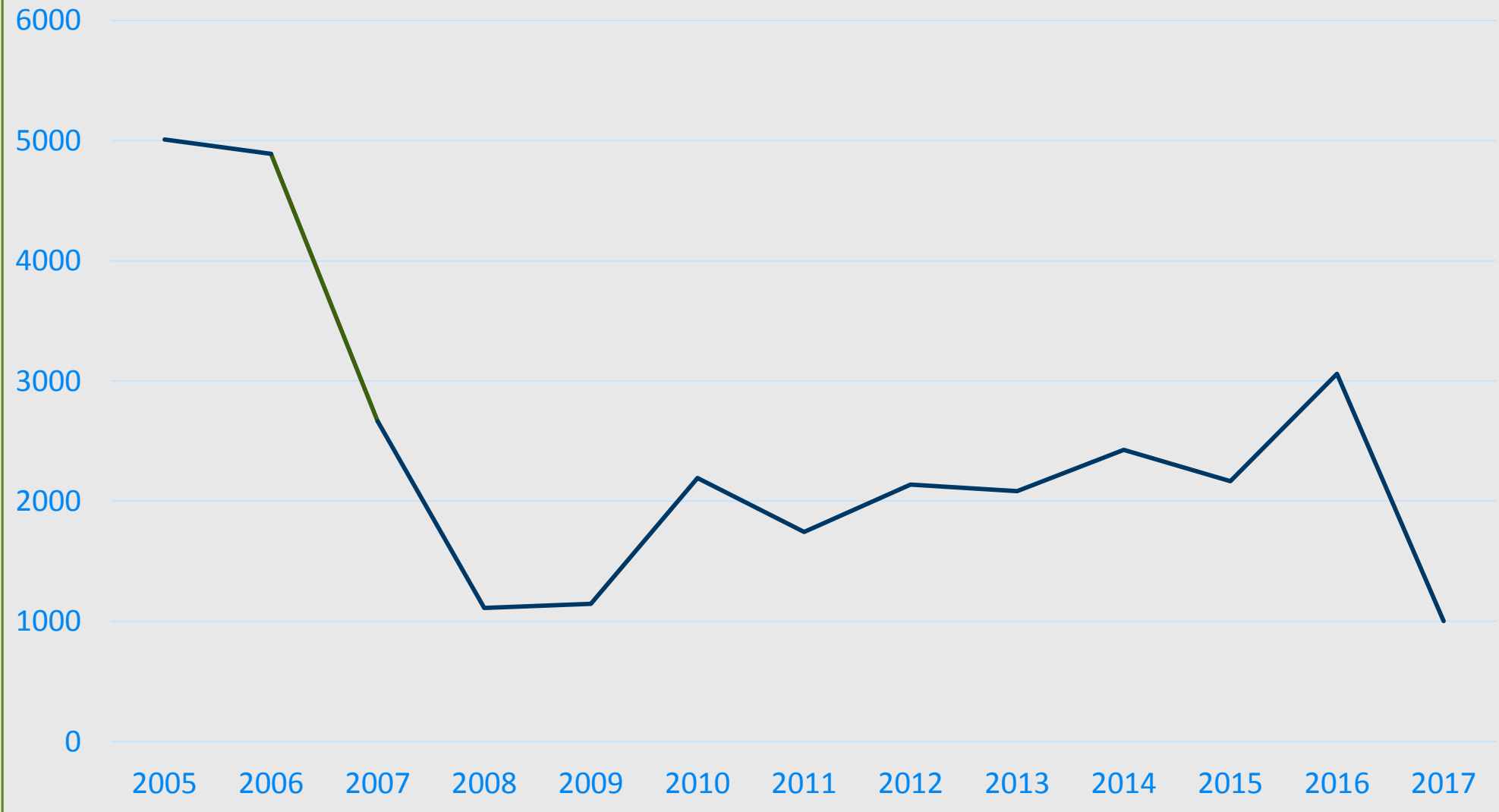
# Minnesota primary arrivals

Arrival Totals

2016=3,059

2017=1,003

2018=543



Calendar year



# FY2018 MN Arrivals to date

## 669 individuals

- Burma (294)
- Democratic Republic of Congo (86)
- Somalia (80)
- Ethiopia (67)
- Ukraine (34)
- Bhutan (28)
- Eritrea(23)
- Belarus (18)
- Russia (13)
- El Salvador (10)
- Kazakhstan (9)
- Other (7): Moldova, Guatemala, Iraq, Kuwait, Senegal, Sri Lanka

What percentage of refugees coming to Minnesota in the last few years have had family connections here?

- a. 25%
- b. 45%
- c. 65%
- d. 95%

Minnesota welcomed 3,059 primary arrivals in 2016. How many of those arrivals were children under 18?

- a. 35%
- b. 54%
- c. 75%

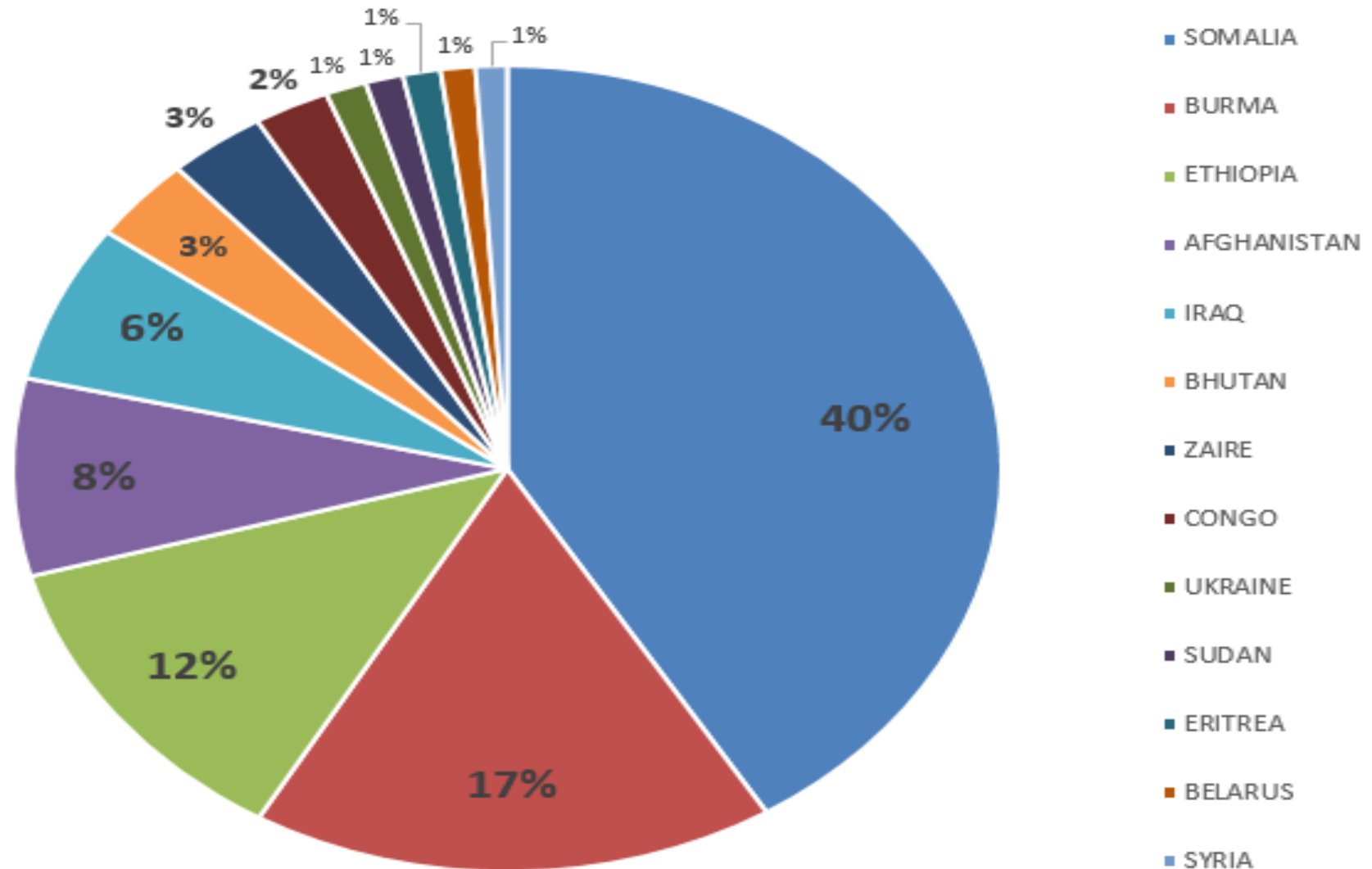
# Impact of recent federal changes

- Drastic reduction in annual refugee arrivals
- Additional screening process lengthens the review and impacts the time sensitive applications
- Dismantled infrastructure for resettlement supports
- Families remain separated



# Primary Refugee Arrivals to Minnesota 2017

Primary  
arrivals in  
2017 =  
1003



# Primary vs. Secondary Refugee Arrivals

## PRIMARY RESETTLEMENT:

Families whose first destination in the U.S. is Minnesota



## SECONDARY RESETTLEMENT:

Refugees who arrive in another state, then move to Minnesota at a later time

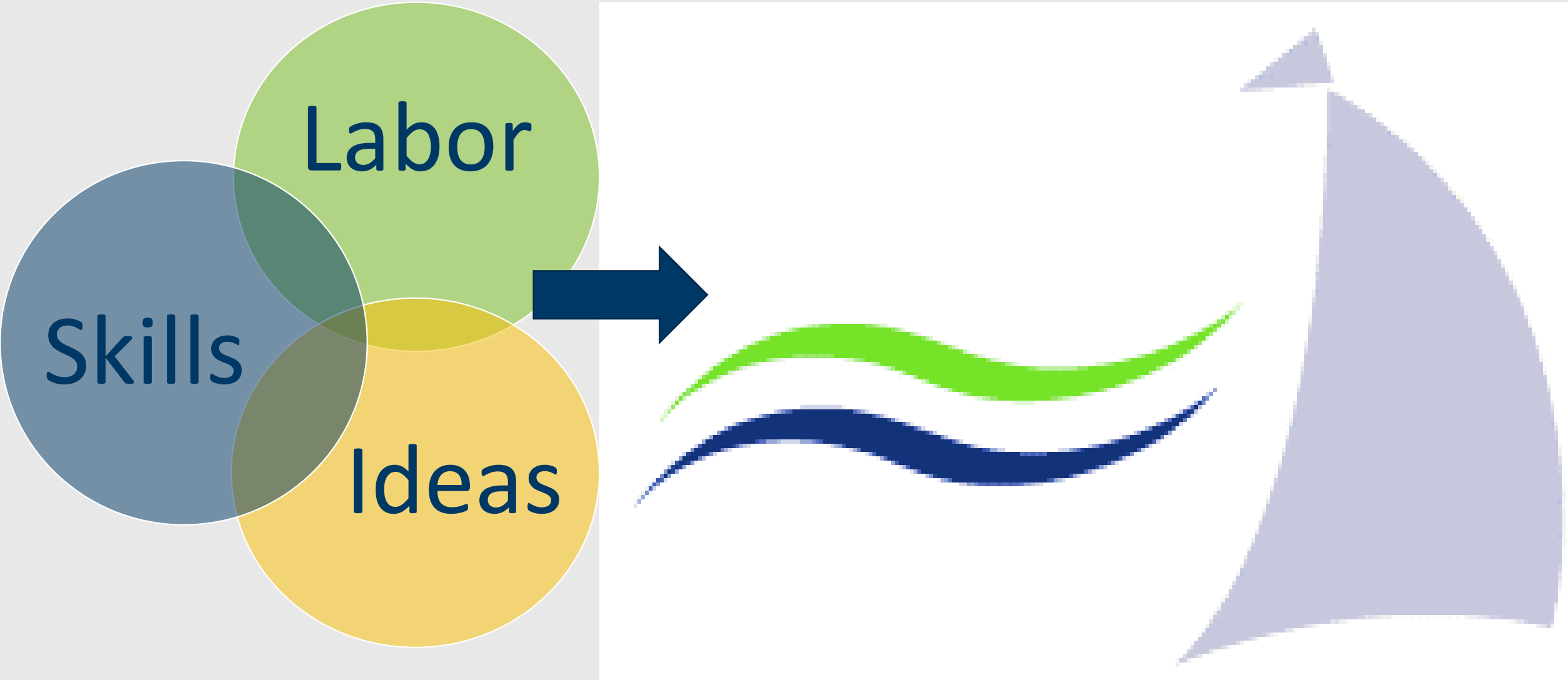
### FACT:

Minnesota leads the nation in secondary refugee migration.

# People with Refugee Status...

- ✓ are invited to resettle in the US only after a thorough vetting process which occurs prior to arrival in the US.
- ✓ have faced extreme hardship and arrive seeking safety and security.
- ✓ receive one-time resettlement assistance and initial resettlement services through local resettlement affiliate (do not get free cars or houses).
- ✓ must meet eligibility criteria to access programs (no special access based on their status).
- ✓ pay taxes.
- ✓ Contribute to our economy and shared prosperity.

# Refugees contribute to Minnesota





# DHS Resettlement Programs Office (RPO)

## Populations served:

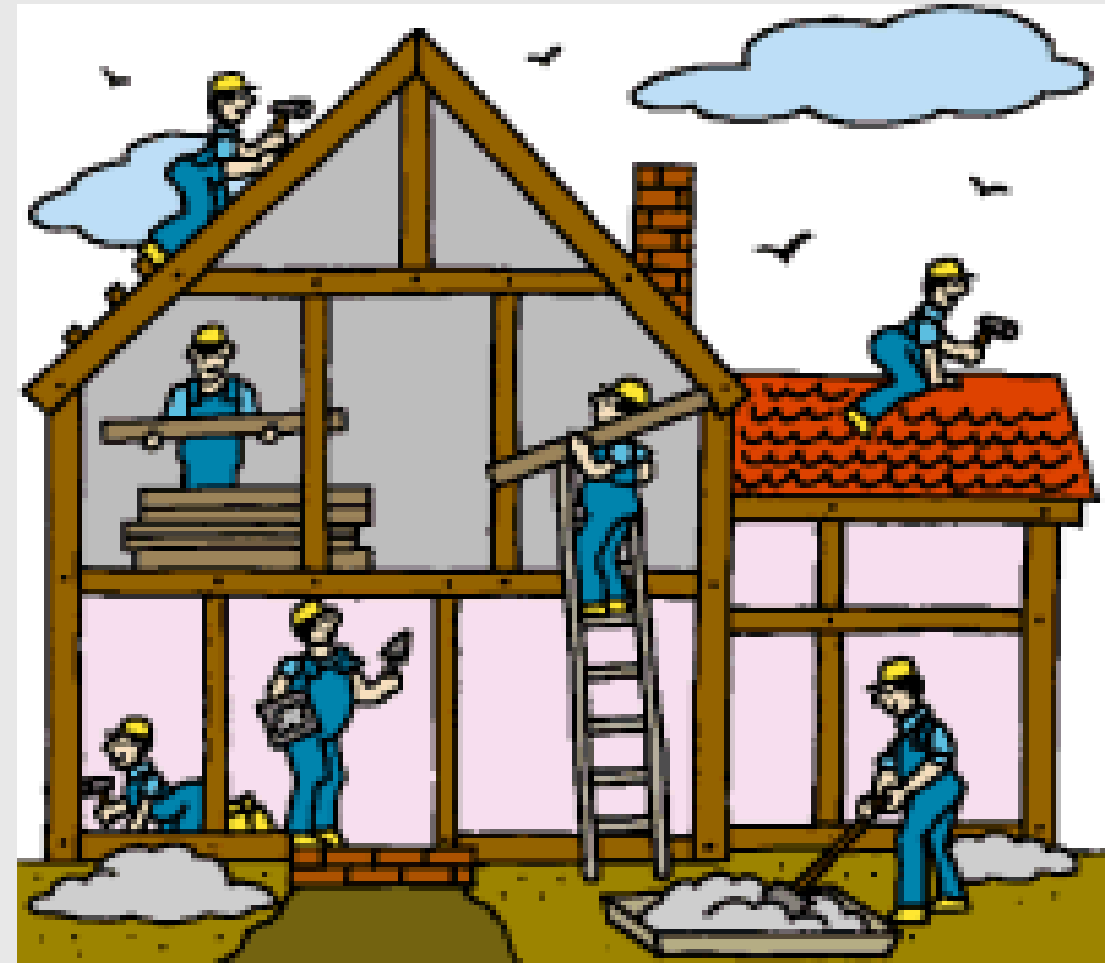
- Refugee
- Asylee
- Special Immigrant Visa holder
- Certified Victims of Trafficking

*All Minnesota residents, including people who have faced extreme hardship, deserve to be treated with compassion and respect, and have the opportunity to reach their full potential.*

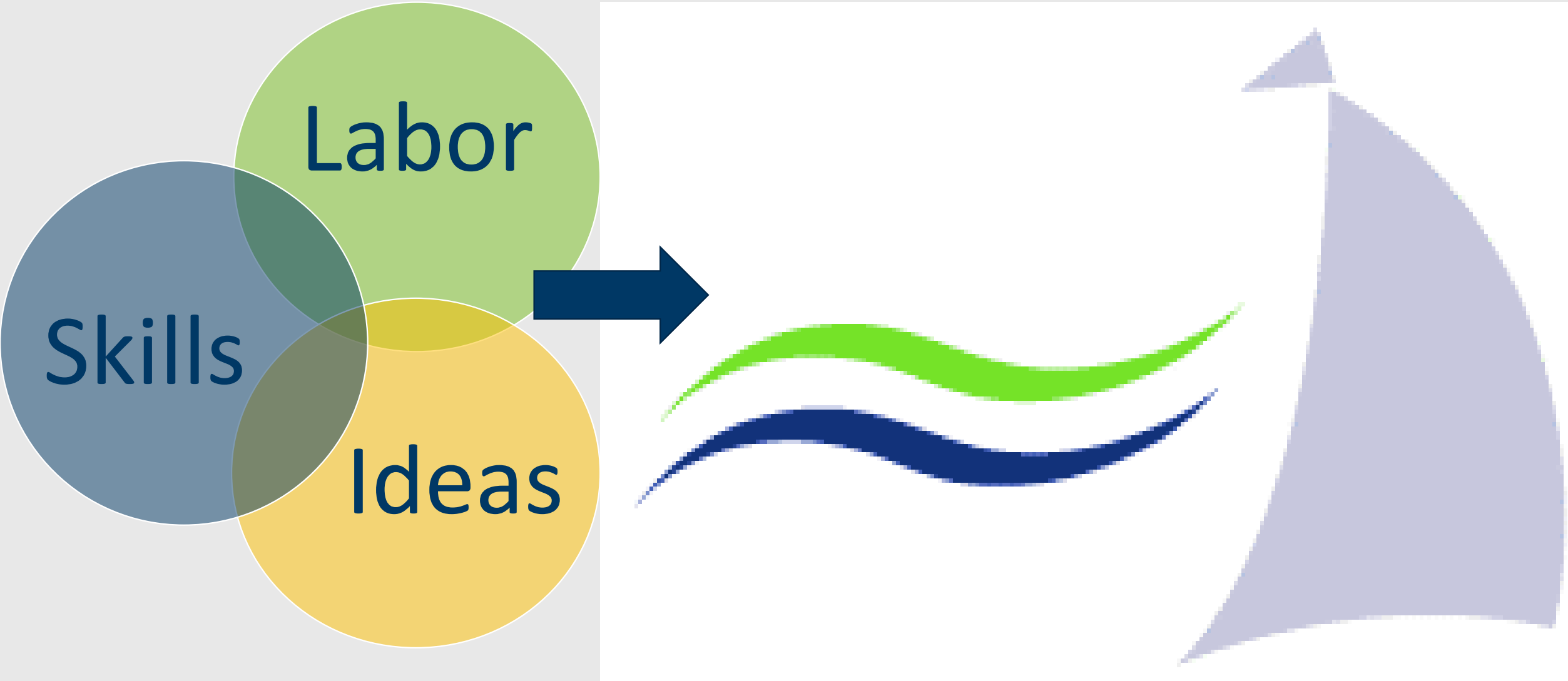
# RPO – Creating a blueprint for building wellbeing

**Building wellbeing is like building a house. It requires **resources**, **expertise** and **collaboration**.**

- Employment Services
- ELL providers /Schools/ Adult education
- Social Services
- Economic supports
- Mainstream safety net resources: food shelves, clothing closets
- Specialized Services: medical, mental health, youth services, elderly services, etc.
- Volunteers and civic engagement



# Refugees contribute to Minnesota





# Current unknowns shaping the future of the refugee program

- Presidential determination
- National Resettlement Agency contracts
- Federal funding
- Overseas processing
- Local Infrastructure
- Continued separation of families
- Local politics – “Opting out”



# State Coordinating Entity

## STATE Coordinating Entity:

- creates a state plan for resettlement which outlines availability of services and supports for new arrivals.
- coordinates federal \$ for supplemental services.
- provides input to federal government on local capacity for resettlement.
- receives information from federal partners related to program.

## STATE Coordinating Entity **DOES NOT**:

- have the power to stop or “pause” refugee resettlement to a state.
- decide how many people will be resettled in a state.
- decide which refugees come to a state.
- control when people arrive with refugee status.
- Resettle refugees

# Refugees are RESILIENT and contribute to MN communities.

- RPO providers assisted 1200 refugees secure their first job in MN. (500 were less than 6 months in the US)
- The federally funded fast-track refugee employment program has 76% self sufficiency rate at 180 days after arrival in the US!
- Are an important part of the MN workforce - 9%
- Contribute to the MN economy – 7.5% of MN GDP
- Refugee populations in MN have a self support index higher than all other demographic groups.

A word cloud centered around the word "REFUGEE". The word "REFUGEE" is the largest and most prominent, rendered in a dark green, serif font. Surrounding it are various other words in different sizes, colors, and orientations. The colors include shades of orange, green, and dark red. The words represent different aspects of a refugee's life, including their status, relationships, and experiences.

REFUGEE

Neighbor

Persecuted

Survivor

Co-worker

Strong

Humanitarian

Trauma

Legal-Status

Thriving

Hard-working

Family

Brother

Sister

Grandmother

Business-owner

Entrepreneur

Safety

Mother

Flee



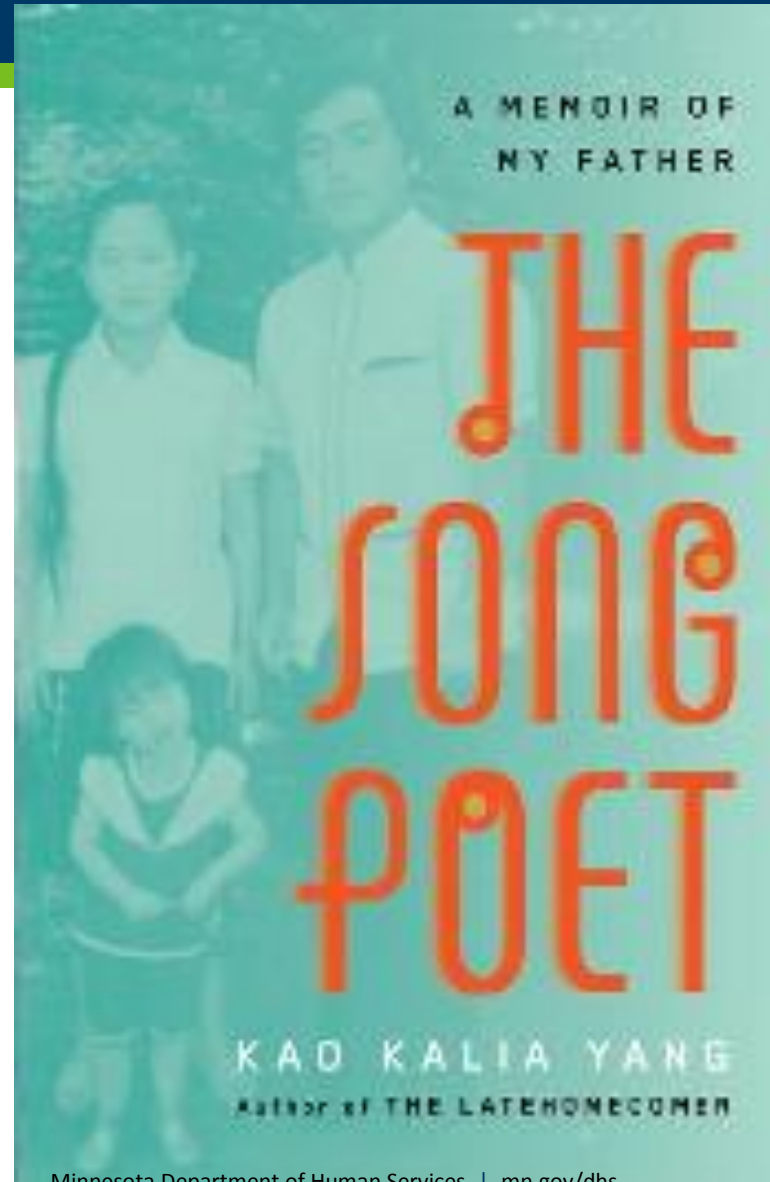
# Abdirahman Kahin, owner of Afro Deli & Grill



# Miss Teen Minnesota Contestant, Halima Aden



## Kao Kalia Yang, author



# Sia Her, Executive Director of the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans







CULTURAL CONNECTOR

HUDDA  
*ibrahim*

“ There are so many hardworking people here, and we want to stay in the community that educated us. ”

# Ilhan Omar, Minnesota House of Representatives





# Outstanding Refugee Awards



# Action and Resources

# Action: TRY SOMETHING NEW!

Learn how to say “hello how are you?” in someone else’s language

Attend a cultural event for a cultural group you that is part of your community

Be a good neighbor! Practice global hospitality

Incorporate oral culture learning in your services: Think of one piece of written information you can supplement with picture or translated resources

Help spread correct information and be a voice for positive stories



# Resettlement Office Resources

## Educational workshops and presentations:

- Refugee Process 101
- World in Your Lobby
- Message Framing for Refugee work
- Immigration and work authorization demystified, Joint presentation with Immigration Lawyers
- Infographics, fact sheets, resources

# Resources

- Learn and Support Action sheet
- Programs Office Overview
- Refugee Program Facts Sheet
- Infographic
- Website card
- Employer resources
- Service brochures

**100 countries**  
**100,000 people since 1979**

# Thank you!

Kristine Bjerkaas Friesen

DHS Resettlement Programs Office

[Kristine.bjerkaas-friesen@state.mn.us](mailto:Kristine.bjerkaas-friesen@state.mn.us)

651-431-3841