Multicultural Resources

(from the State of Maine DHHS Office of Multicultural Affairs)

**Introduction to Immigration**

**Who are the Limited English Proficient (LEP) people in Maine?**

**Residents**

Lawful permanent residents (LPRs) are foreign-born individuals who have been admitted to live permanently in the United States. People become LPRs through various ways, including family-sponsored immigration, employment-based immigration, refugee and asylum admissions, an annual “visa lottery,” and a variety of other legal avenues. Family-sponsored immigration typically accounts for more than two-thirds of all legal immigration into the United States each year.

*(Sources: USCIS Annual Statistical Yearbook (various years), available at: http://uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/index.htm, and “A New Century: Immigration and the US,” Migration Information Source, February 2005*[*http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=283*](http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=283)*)*

**Immigrants**

An immigrant is broadly defined in the United States Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) as any person who is not a citizen or national of the United States, except for persons admitted with temporary (“nonimmigrant” – see definition below) visas. An undocumented noncitizen, for example, who entered the United States without permission, would be defined as an immigrant under the INA. However, many people use the term “immigrant” to refer to an individual admitted to the United States as a Lawful Permanent Resident.

*(Source: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*[*http://uscis.gov/graphics/glossary2.htm#I*](http://uscis.gov/graphics/glossary2.htm#I)*)*

**Refugees**

A refugee, in most cases, is a person who is outside of his or her country of nationality and is unable or unwilling to return due to having suffered persecution in the past, or having a well-founded fear of future persecution because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

The number of refugees who will be admitted into the United States is set annually by the President in consultation with Congress, and there are also limits by global geographic regions. Refugees are eligible to apply for permanent resident status after one year of physical presence in the United States. . Catholic Charities Maine Refugee and Immigrant Services has resettled over 12,000 refugees in the past 30 years.

In the U.S. refugees are authorized to work upon arrival, and are eligible for federal benefits to help them begin their lives again in the U.S.

*(Sources: United States Citizenship and Immigration Services*

Website: [*http://www.migrationinformation.org/Glossary/*](http://www.migrationinformation.org/Glossary/))

**Asylees**

An asylee is a refugee whose fear of persecution has been recognized by the United States government after the asylee has already arrived in the United States or in a U.S. territory, and has applied for and been granted asylum in the United States. Asylees are eligible to apply for lawful permanent resident status after one year of physical presence in the United States, and are eligible for the same federal public benefits as refugees.   
*(Source: United States Citizenship and Immigration Services   
Website:*[*http://uscis.gov/graphics/glossary.htm#A*](http://uscis.gov/graphics/glossary.htm#A)*)*

**For A Deeper Understanding Of Refugees**

Most refugees are forced to leave their country of origin because of threat of death, bodily harm, economic ruin, and/or social isolation. Contrary to what many think, refugees do not always come from countries where there is a civil war. Conditions such as famine, drought and even tsunamis, while they may force persons to abandon their homes and their countries, do not constitute a reason for being granted refugee status. The number of refugees allowed into the U.S., and the countries represented in any given year, have as much to do with U.S. foreign policy and economic interests as with any humanitarian concerns.

* Most refugees would rather remain in their homeland.
* Most refugees arrive in poor psychological and physical condition as a result of exposure to extreme violence, torture, starvation, and/or imprisonment.
* Most refugees have spent prolonged periods in abysmal refugee camps in a third country while awaiting “placement”.

Refugees may be given a choice of resettlement in two or three countries, but may find that they are not accepted for their first choice, nor can they decide where to live within that country in terms of their original resettlement location. After arriving at their resettlement location, refugees are free to relocate to any other part of the U.S. but they may not be able to access federal refugee resettlement benefits depending on when they move from one place to another in the U.S.

**An Explanation Of The U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program**

Each refugee case approved for admission to the United States is R&P by one of ten “voluntary agencies” participating in the Reception & Placement program under a cooperative agreement with the Department of State.

The sponsoring agency is responsible for placing the refugees included in a case with one of its affiliated offices in an appropriate location in the United States and for providing initial services, which include housing, essential furnishings, food, clothing, community orientation and referral to other social and employment services, for the refugees’ first 30-90 days in the U.S. The R&P program is a public-private partnership, which anticipates that voluntary agencies will contribute significant cash and/or in-kind resources to supplement U.S. Government per capita grants.

*(Source: The State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration*[*http://www.state.gov/g/prm/*](http://www.state.gov/g/prm/)*)*

**For A Deeper Understanding Of Immigrants**

* Immigrants are a very diverse group of people who come to the United States (and to Maine) for many reasons.
* Immigrants often arrive in the United States on either permanent or temporary work visas or through family members who have submitted immigration applications on their behalf.
* Most immigrants choose willingly to come to the United States. Nevertheless, that choice may also have been influenced by issues of unemployment, natural disaster, or hunger in their nation of origin. Many immigrants struggle with similar issues to refugees of separation from spouses, children, or extended family supports.
* Many immigrants have higher education or hold professional certifications in their nation of origin—credentials which often are not transferable to similar credentials in the United States. Most immigrants end up working in positions drastically lower in prestige and/or power than what they held in their nation of origin.