REFUGEE HOUSING RESOURCE GUIDE

BUREAU OF REFUGEE PROGRAMS (BRP)

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

06/2026

Table of Contents

Introduction: Housing Resource Guide 2
Refugees and Newcomers in Wisconsin 2
Section 1 Newcomer Housing Staff Orientation 3
New Staff 3
New Arrival Preparation 3
Exhibit 1A | Wisconsin- Know your Rights 5
Exhibit 1B | Fact Sheet on Renting to Refugees and Other Eligible Newcomers 6
Exhibit 1C | Housing Selection 101 8
Exhibit 1D | Housing Checklist 9
Exhibit 1E | Federal Housing Program 13
Section 2 Newcomer Housing Orientation 14
Roles of the Resettlement Agency/Housing Staff 14
Rights as a Tenant in Wisconsin 14
Responsibilities as a Tenant 14
Resources for Tenants 15
Lead-Safe Wisconsin: Lead-Safe Homes Program 15
Lead Hazard Reduction Program 15
Lead Outreach Program - Sixteenth Street 15
Exhibit 2A | Sample Memorandum of Understanding for Tenants 16
Exhibit 2B | Reviewing the Lease 17
Exhibit 2C | Sample Housing Walk-Through Checklist 20
Exhibit 2D | Home Safety 23
Exhibit 2E | Utilities (We Energies) 25
Section 3 Landlords Partnering with Refugees 27
Working with Landlords 27
Benefits of Renting to Refugees 27
Wisconsin Landlord Responsibilities 27
Resources for Landlords 28
Exhibit 3A | Wisconsin's "Renting to refugees" handout 29
Exhibit 3B | Renting to Refugees and Eligible Newcomers | Frequently Asked Questions 31
Exhibit 3C | Housing Provider | Frequently Asked Questions 35
Exhibit 3D | Sample checklist to assure landlords of the benefits of renting to refugees 40

Introduction: Housing Resource Guide

To support newcomer housing and relationship building throughout Wisconsin, BRP has collected, assessed, and distilled external resources outlined below into a high-level resource guide.

This guide was created for housing staff, newcomers, and landlords to ensure self-sufficiency through housing. Each section outlines key topics, essential resources, and templates to successfully navigate housing in Wisconsin.

Within each section, key housing topics are addressed but are not all inclusive to housing needs or best practices. External links, examples, and templates are shared from various recognized resources while maintaining the originators style and formatting. If available, the eternal pathway link was added to the exhibit header for a comprehensive individual review of the external resource.

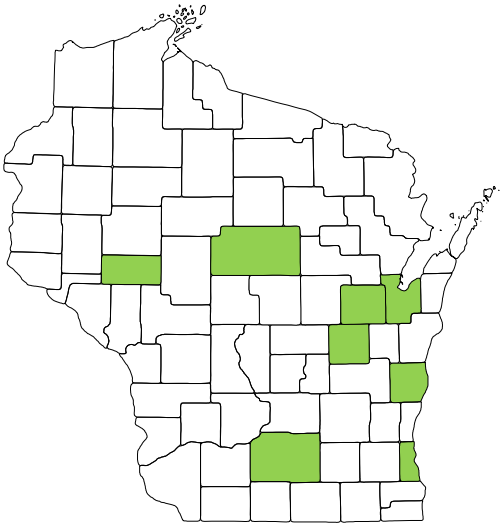
Each exhibit varies in style and formatting, as BRP is not the developer of the shared exhibits. However, BRP acknowledges their strength and versatility in practice. Section exhibits can be utilized and adapted to enhance caseworker knowledge, internal tools, and housing acquisition to align with individual styles or workplace directed formatting, with appropriate reference citation.

Recognized Resources

- Refugee Housing Solutions: “Refugee Housing Solutions provides technical housing support to resettlement practitioners, landlords and property managers, refugees, and volunteers across the United States and partners with them to develop and implement cohesive strategies to increase the availability and affordability of housing.”
- Wisconsin Housing Directory - Refugee Housing Solutions: Local community partners and agencies in Wisconsin. This link was updated with BRP's support in 2025.
- Switchboard: “Switchboard provides tools, learning opportunities, research, and technical assistance covering a range of topics related to the newcomer experience.”
- SettleIn: “SettleIn is your best place to find trusted and accurate information about the U.S. resettlement process and life in the United States.”

Refugees and Newcomers in Wisconsin

This map illustrates locations of current or previous local resettlement agencies throughout Wisconsin. Awareness of refugee communities helps build awareness of housing relationships already forged.



Section 1 Newcomer Housing Staff Orientation

New Staff

Resettlement agency housing staff

Housing staff i.e., case manager, case worker, and/or case aide ensure that each newly arrived refugee client/family has living essentials, including housing furniture and food, and is oriented to resources and references for their new home and community.

Historically, housing staff collaborate with initial placement case managers to ensure that clients receive the required core services outlined in their cooperative agreement or Matching Grant program guidelines.

Housing staff also collaborate with local landlords, leasing agencies, and housing community providers. They conduct outreach and build relationships with local landlords and housing agencies to benefit clients, resettlement agencies, and the community. Section three will provide an in-depth review of working with landlords.

In addition to the hiring agencies' training for housing staff, they should connect with other local resettlement agency staff to collaborate on local housing efforts, learn the community and what would best fit the family's needs, and participate in any available state-facilitated case worker meetings and/or trainings.

Below are key points a new housing staff should fully understand when serving newcomer populations, along with how to start the house securing process prior to arrivals.

New Arrival Preparation

- **Know your Rights:** understanding tenant rights and responsibilities in Wisconsin
- **Alternative ID Documents** use the I-94 Card issued by the U.S. Customs & Immigration Service (USCIS)

- **Ability to Pay:** prepare a resettlement agency promissory note to pay a stated amount of money to a specified person on set dates
- **Housing Size:** number of bedrooms required for family size
- **Accessibility Requirements:** accessibility requirements for a disabled or elderly family member
- **Location:** proximity to public transportation or is considered "walkable" or "bikeable" for access to work, food stores, schools, laundry facilities, medical facilities, etc.
- **Realistic Expectations:** A first home that a newcomer can afford to rent may not meet expectations or be as familiar to them
- **Federal Housing Programs:** review eligibility requirements

Exhibit 1A | Wisconsin- Know your Rights

Wisconsin

Tenant Responsibilities

Tenants in Wisconsin have their own set of responsibilities to manage. These obligations ensure the rental is maintained and the landlord goes financially unharmed. In Wisconsin, tenants must:

- Pay rent when due
- Not disturb other tenants or neighbors
- Keep the unit clean, as outlined in the lease
- Comply with all building and housing codes affecting health and safety
- Use all facilities, appliances, and utilities as they should be used
- Make small repairs or pay for repairs for any damage or issues caused by the renter

Repairs & Maintenance

Wisconsin state law requires landlords to make repairs "promptly" after receiving written notice from tenants. If the landlord fails to make repairs within a timely manner, renters are allowed to withhold a percentage of the following rent payment. Unlike most other states, tenants can only sue the landlord if the landlord promises to make repairs and then fails to follow through.

Security Deposit

Wisconsin landlords can collect a security deposit at the start of the lease period to cover unexpected costs at the end of the lease term. However, to collect a security deposit, landlords are required to notify tenants of their right to inspect the property and document the condition of the rental unit via a check sheet. Landlords can charge as much as they want for a security deposit and are required to provide a receipt that includes the amount and purpose of payment.

At the end of the lease term, the landlord must return the tenant's security deposit within 21 days. Landlords can deduct from the security deposit for reasons including rental property damage exceeding normal wear and tear, municipal permit fees, costs outlined in the lease, and unpaid rent and utilities.

If the landlord fails to comply with the notice period or wrongfully withholds funds, tenants can sue for twice the full security deposit, plus court costs and attorney fees.

Lease Termination

To terminate a lease in Wisconsin, tenants must provide a notice period. Month-to-month leases are required to provide a 28-day notice, while year-to-year leases must provide a 5-day notice. All other lease types are not required to provide a specific notice period.

Wisconsin tenants can terminate lease agreements early for the following legal reasons:

- Active military duty
- Early termination clause
- Landlord harassment
- Uninhabitable unit
- Domestic violence

Eviction

Wisconsin state law allows landlords to evict tenants for certain legal reasons. Depending on the reason for eviction, landlords must provide a notice period before the eviction can start. The reasons for eviction and associated notice periods are as follows:

- Unpaid rent - If the tenant with a written lease of a year or less does not pay rent on time, the landlord may issue a 5-day notice to comply or a 14-day notice to quit. For tenants with written leases longer than a year, a landlord may issue a 30-day notice to comply.
- Illegal acts - If the tenant has been found committing illegal acts, such as drug-related activity or violent acts, at the property, the landlord may issue a 5-day notice to quit. After the notice period, the landlord can move forward with the eviction process.
- Imminent harm - If a tenant poses an imminent threat to another tenant or a tenant's child, and there is a protection order or a criminal complaint against the renter for domestic abuse, stalking, or sexual assault, the landlord may issue a 5-day notice to quit.
- No lease/end of lease - If the tenant stays at the property past the end of the lease period, the landlord can issue a notice to quit. The amount of advance notice depends on the length of the tenancy. Week-to-week leases require a 7-day notice to quit and month-to-month leases require a 28-day notice to quit. There is no statute specifying the required notice periods for other types of tenancies.

Other

Wisconsin does not have rent control laws and prohibits its cities and towns from creating their own laws. Thus, landlords can charge any amount of rent and increase the rent amount as often as they choose if it is not during the lease term (unless the lease allows for it). Wisconsin does not specify how much notice a landlord should provide a tenant before raising rent. Thus, the two parties can come to an agreement on a minimum notice period.

If tenants fail to pay rent on time, landlords are not required to provide a grace period before instating a late fee. Wisconsin does not have a limit on how much a landlord may charge for a late fee, but the fee must be reasonable.

Tenants are allowed to withhold rent payments in the case that the property becomes unlivable, the landlord is unable to promptly make the repairs, and if the tenant must move to another property until the issue is fixed.

Download More Resources

Exhibit 1B | Fact Sheet on Renting to Refugees and Other Eligible Newcomers

Fact Sheet on Renting to Refugees and Other Eligible Newcomers

The U.S. federal government assists refugees and other eligible newcomer populations with resettlement support services as they begin to rebuild their lives in the United States. This fact sheet answers questions that landlords and property managers may have as they consider renting to refugees and other eligible newcomers.

About Refugees and Other Eligible Newcomers

A **refugee** is a person who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is managed by the U.S. Department of State, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Refugee resettlement in the United States represents the opportunity to start anew and pursue a life of safety and dignity without fear of violence or persecution.

Other newcomer populations are also eligible for resettlement support services. Eligible newcomer populations include **asylees** (individuals granted asylum in the United States), **Cubans and Haitians** granted entry to the United States, **Afghan and Iraqi Special Immigrant Visa holders** who supported the U.S. mission in Afghanistan and Iraq, **victims of human trafficking**, certain **Afghan humanitarian parolees**, and certain **Ukrainian humanitarian parolees**.

All refugees and eligible newcomers are **lawfully present** in the United States.

The U.S. Government provides significant support to refugees and other eligible newcomers:

All refugees and eligible newcomers are eligible for federally funded support and assistance from the U.S. Department of State and/or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). These services include, but are not limited to:

- Financial assistance
- Job readiness and employment placement services
- Orientation that includes home maintenance and budgeting
- Interpretation services and English language instruction
- Support from federal agencies, state and local agencies, resettlement staff, volunteers and/or community groups to help mitigate issues or communication challenges

The U.S. Government partners with ten national resettlement agencies, which have more than 340 affiliates across the country, to support refugees and other eligible newcomers. When you rent to refugees and other eligible newcomers, you get tenants who receive these services and assistance from local resettlement agencies and other community-based and faith-based organizations. Partnerships with these local agencies create a mutually beneficial relationship that provides housing to refugees and other eligible newcomers and supports your community's economic and cultural vitality.

A promissory note and/or letter of support from a resettlement agency may outline the financial support a housing applicant will receive from the local resettlement organization and state or federal agencies. In addition, all refugees and eligible newcomers are eligible to receive rental assistance funds and/or cash assistance for basic needs.

Scan for more information.

V1: May 2024

Refugees and other eligible newcomers are able to work:

Refugees are authorized to work immediately upon their arrival in the United States, though they may not have a job as soon as they arrive. Many other eligible newcomers are also authorized to work (either immediately or after a certain period). All refugees and eligible newcomers are eligible for job readiness and employment placement services.

Refugees and other eligible newcomers have documentation of their legal status:

All refugees and other eligible newcomers are lawfully present in the United States and receive documentation of their legal status from the U.S. Government. For example, refugees receive a Form I-94, Arrival/Departure Record, which does not expire. This is evidence that they are legally in the United States and are eligible to work.

It takes time for refugees and other eligible newcomers to receive other forms of documentation, and they may not have them at the time they are seeking housing. For example, while refugees are eligible immediately for a Social Security number, the Social Security Administration needs to create a Social Security card and deliver it to the refugee. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) also creates and delivers an Employment Authorization Document. Many arrive without a passport as they fled without one from their home country, and may still lack an identification card from the U.S. state in which they reside.

Refugees and eligible newcomers receive background checks from the U.S. Government:

Many refugees and other eligible newcomers may not have a state ID or a Social Security number immediately after arrival, which means a landlord may not be able to run a background check. However, all refugees and other eligible newcomers are screened and vetted by various U.S. Government agencies. For example, refugees undergo mandatory and rigorous security vetting by the U.S. Government, including biometric and biographic security checks, medical exams, and interviews with USCIS.

Credit Checks

If a landlord or property manager requires credit checks at admission, they may generally forgo credit checks for refugees and other eligible newcomers:

Landlords and property managers may generally forgo credit checks for any potential resident as long as they do not violate the Fair Housing Act, which prohibits discrimination in housing-related transactions on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), familial status, and disability.* For example, if a credit check exception is made because of immigration status (like refugee status), the exception must apply equally to all those in the immigration status and not only to those of a certain national origin.

It is a best practice for landlords and property managers to review their credit check policies (and other background check policies) to ensure that they do not discriminate unlawfully against any protected class under the Fair Housing Act. Landlords and property owners may use alternate forms of verification to assess the ability of a prospective tenant to pay rent without traditional credit, whether refugee, parolee, or otherwise. For example, if a refugee resettlement agency will provide full rent payments for the refugee family, other verification of ability to pay would appear unnecessary since the purpose of the credit check would be to provide a reasonable basis for believing that a tenant's rent will be paid.

For more information from the Department of Housing and Urban Development on refugees and other eligible newcomers, including fair housing issues and credit requirements, please see:

https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/field_policy_mgt/refugees
https://www.hud.gov/fairhousing

** One exception to this general rule is in the public housing context. Depending on the circumstances, public housing authorities may not have complete discretion in forgoing a general policy of performing credit checks. Visit hud.gov for more information.*

Scan for more information.

V1: May 2024

Refugee Housing
SOLUTIONS

Housing Selection 101

In this blog post, we focus on the housing selection process for newcomers, from walk–through to move-in.

THE WALK-THROUGH CHECKLIST

After identifying appropriate housing, the newcomer family and their case manager should visit the property to be sure it meets housing safety and functionality standards. Arrive at the housing site with either a smartphone or a camera and notepad to document any preexisting damage to the unit, and download this housing walk–through checklist to be sure nothing is forgotten.

What to do if the housing does NOT meet standards?

The housing market is competitive. Renters are bound by location, cost, and the size of a unit. Compromise is inevitable, but safety and cleanliness are non-negotiable. Newcomers and their representatives must use their best judgement when deciding if a residence is appropriate. The walk-through is your opportunity to assess this and to document problems that exist in the unit before signing a lease. Discuss any issues with the landlord to determine if the problems can be addressed prior to move-in.

EXECUTING THE LEASE AGREEMENT

After completing the walk-through and approving the unit's safety and cleanliness, prospective tenants and landlords execute the lease, a process that has three steps:

- The landlord creates the lease and sends it to the prospective tenant.
- The prospective tenant reviews the lease, makes any necessary adjustments, provides their signature, and then sends the lease back to the landlord.
- The landlord conducts a final review and provides their signature.

The lease sets the tone for the tenant's relationship with their landlord and the unit in which they'll reside. It determines the protocol for the entire term of the lease (typically one year). **Therefore, it is essential to review carefully before signing.**

Housing Checklist

Refugee Housing SOLUTIONS

A GUIDE TO FINDING, SECURING, PREPARING, AND SETTLING INTO A NEW HOME

This guide provides case managers, sponsors, and newcomers with a clear, step-by-step approach to successfully navigating the housing process. From finding suitable housing to settling into a new home, this checklist covers key actions in each stage, ensuring a smooth transition. Whether you're searching for housing, understanding lease terms, furnishing your home, or adjusting to your new living environment, this resource offers practical tips and essential reminders to help newcomers settle into their new community with confidence.

Finding Housing Checklist

Preparation and Planning

Assess housing needs (size, type, location)

Consider housing proximity to essential services (transportation, schools, etc.)

Set a monthly budget, including rent, utilities, and other living expenses

Identify neighborhoods that fit needs, budgets, and preferences

Collect rental documents, like proof of income, identification, etc.

Arrange for temporary accommodations while searching for permanent housing

Housing Search

Research local housing availability within budget

Use online platforms, community bulletin boards, and local networks to find available rental properties

Contact landlords or property managers to arrange unit tours
- Be ready to explain your newcomer's status and address potential concerns

Prepare questions about rent, lease terms, utilities, and maintenance responsibilities

Submit applications with all required information and documents
- Be prepared to pay application fee or deposits

Finding Housing Resources:

- Step-by-Step Guide to Securing Housing
- Strategies for Community Sponsors Assisting with Newcomer Housing
- How to Recruit and Retain Housing Providers
- Landlord Conversation Guides
- Rental Application Essentials: How Newcomers Can Use Alternative Documents
- Sample Housing Walkthrough Checklist

refugeehousing.org

Refugee Housing Solutions is a project of Church World Service under an agreement paid for by the U.S. Department of State.

Securing Housing Checklist

Lease Signing and Initial Costs

Carefully review and understand all terms before signing the lease
- Provide translation support if needed

Ensure both the tenant and landlord sign the lease agreement

Provide the required security deposit as outlined in the lease

Submit the first month's rent payment as required

Prepay additional months of rent if needed to secure the lease

Obtain a copy of the signed lease

Document any other costs, such as pet fees or utility setup fees

Evaluate and decide whether to get renter's insurance

Confirm Move-in Arrangements

Verify the move-in date with the landlord

Confirm the time and location for key pick-up or access to the property

Ensure necessary repairs and maintenance are completed before move-in

Confirm any move-in fees or requirements, such as building access codes

Have a communication plan, in case of emergencies, with the landlord

Plan for transition from temporary to long-term housing, as relevant

Finding Housing Resources:

- How to Understand a Lease
- Understanding Your Lease Agreement

Preparing the Housing Checklist

Prepare the Accommodation

Arrange for utilities (electricity, water, gas, internet) to be active before move-in

Schedule a final walkthrough with the landlord to inspect the property

Ensure the property is clean and in good condition for move-in

Conduct a safety and functionality walkthrough (ensure working heating systems, appliances, etc.)

Ensure smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and electrical outlets, work

Check security features (locks, windows, alarms)

Furnish and Equip the Home

Provide essential furnishings: bed, dresser (if needed), sofa/chairs, dining table/chairs.

Equip the kitchen with dishes, utensils, cookware, and storage containers.

Supply bed linens and hygiene products (toothbrush, soap, etc.).

Offer appliance instructions in the newcomer's first language, if needed.

Provide basic cleaning supplies (broom, mop, vacuum, cleaners).

Ensure sufficient lighting (lamps for bedrooms and living areas).

Provide a basic toolkit (hammer, screwdriver, pliers).

Finding Housing Resources:

- Home Set-up Guide

Move-In Checklist

Move-In Support

Organize basic supplies: food, toiletries, and essentials for arrival

Plan transportation to the new home

Schedule a home orientation meeting to discuss the home's features

Review U.S. housing norms and safety practices, including tenant rights and responsibilities

Provide basic home safety guidelines

Schedule follow-up meetings to support adjustment

Address issues promptly and offer ongoing guidance

Create a Welcome Packet

Home orientation guide, including instructions for operating appliances (stovetop, oven, microwave, etc.), heating/cooling systems, and property maintenance guidelines

Transportation options (bus routes, train stations, etc.)

Healthcare facilities (hospitals, pharmacies, etc.)

Local grocery stores, banks, and other essential services

Nearby community centers, places of worship, and ethnic community groups

Landlord's contact information

Maintenance or emergency repair contact information

Local emergency services (fire, police, medical) and non-emergency numbers

Trash and recycling rules pickup schedules

Parking and building access rules (e.g., permits, guest parking)

Overview of tenant rights according to local, state, and national laws

Move-In Resources:

- Welcome to Your New Home – An Illustrated Guide (translated)
- Please Repair – An Illustrated Guide (translated)
- Home Safety
- Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange: Housing
- Know Your Rights: State-by-State Housing Guide

Exhibit 1E | Federal Housing Program

Refugee Housing SOLUTIONS

Section 214 is a law that defines the eligible noncitizen categories who may receive financial assistance from HUD.

Federal Housing Program Eligibility for Newcomers

NEWCOMER POPULATION	Section 214-Covered Programs						Non-214 Housing Programs		Non-214 USDA Rural Housing Programs					HUD Homeless Assistance Programs			Single Family Mortgage Assistance Programs		
	Housing Choice Voucher Program	Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance	Public Housing	Rural Rental Assistance (USDA)	Rural Development Voucher Program (USDA)	Single-Family Direct Loan Program (502 & 504)	Supportive Housing for the Elderly (202)	Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities (811)	Multifamily Gauranteed Loans (538)	Farm Labor Housing Loans & Grants (514/516)	Rural Rental Housing Loans (515)	Low Income Housing Tax Credit Funded Properties	HOME/CDBG, other grant programs	Emergency Solutions Grant (rapid rehousing & transitional housing)	Continuum of Care program	Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) program	HUD FHA Loans	USDA RHS Loans	VA Loans (based on veteran status)
Unauthorized immigrants	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Nonimmigrants (e.g., tourists, students, temporary workers)	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Lawful Permanent Residents (green card holders)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Refugees and asylees	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	PI
Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	PI
Survivors of Torture	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	PI
Victims of Trafficking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	PE	✓	PI
Certain abused spouses/children (VAWA, self-petitioners)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	PE	✓	PI
Cuban and Haitian entrants	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	PE	✓	PI
Afghan and Ukrainian parolees	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	PI
Venezuelan and Nicaraguan parolees	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	PE	> 1 year	PI
Other nationality with parole	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	PE	> 1 year	PI
DACA Receipients	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	PI
Freely Associated States (FAS) Migrants	PE	PE	PE	PE	PE	PE	✓	✓	PE	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓

PE = Presumed Eligible
PI = Presumed Ineligible

Section 2 Newcomer Housing Orientation

Housing staff should have a list of housing cultural orientation topics to educate clients on. Below are topics that may require more attention with exhibits for tools, templates, and samples that can be adapted to your agency and community.

Roles of the Resettlement Agency/Housing Staff

- **Orient:** to the new home and community
- **Demonstrate/Instruct:** how to operate apartment equipment such as stove, microwave, refrigerator/freezer, heat and/or AC, bathroom/toilet, garbage (recyclables/nonrecyclables), etc.
- **Identify:** environmental risks and health hazards
- **Educate:** how to identify and report maintenance issues
- **Teach:** how to pay rent and any utilities

Rights as a Tenant in Wisconsin

Below are topics that should be taught to new arrivals. They can be adapted to be taught verbally, provided in written material, or used as visual aids.

- **Fair housing:** Discrimination is illegal; housing cannot be denied because of race, religion, national origin, family status, or disability
- **Written leases:** required for rental agreements longer than one year
- **Safe housing:** the home should be free of hazards and follow housing/building codes
    - It is the landlord's responsibility to provide safe and livable housing. Newcomers should refrain from attempting to clean up environmental and health hazards in the home. Examples are:
        - Mold - fungi formation
        - Lead - a highly toxic material that can cause lead poisoning
            - Milwaukee County in particular has a heightened focus on lead prevention
                - https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/lead/index.htm
- **Security deposit:** returned minus deductions within 21 days of moving out
- **Evictions:** a legal written notice that goes through the court process

Responsibilities as a Tenant

- **Pay rent** on time
- **Follow your lease** terms
- **Keep your home clean** and safe
- **Report maintenance** issues quickly
- **Respect neighbors** and community rules
- **Preventive maintenance** and home safety
    - YouTube Video 3:38 - Home Safety (English)

Resources for Tenants

- **Legal Action of Wisconsin**: Free legal help for housing issues
  www.legalaction.org
- **Wisconsin Tenant Resource Center**: Lease and tenant education
  www.tenantresourcecenter.org
- **Refugee Housing Solutions:** Wisconsin local assistance directory

  Wisconsin Housing Directory - Refugee Housing Solutions
- **Tenant Toolkit**: A Tool for newcomer applicants and renters

  Tenant Toolkit - Refugee Housing Solutions
- **Lead Awareness and Prevention**: Wisconsin lead program education

  Lead-Safe Wisconsin: Lead-Safe Homes Program
  Lead Hazard Reduction Program
  Lead Outreach Program - Sixteenth Street

Exhibit 2A | Sample Memorandum of Understanding for Tenants

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Between resettlement agency Insert Name and refugee names (Tenants) Insert Names regarding a loan to assist with rent at street address, Insert Address:

Details of this agreement are listed below, and any subsequent changes must be made in writing and agreed upon by both parties:

1. Resettlement agency Insert Name agrees to pay the security deposit in the amount of $amount of monthly rent or security deposit, along with a letter of guarantee to the property management, name of landlord or property manager if required, on behalf of the Tenants.
2. Resettlement agency Insert Name agrees to pay $amount of monthly rent or agreed upon amount each month directly to name of landlord or property management for rent assistance; Tenants agree to pay $amount refugee able to contribute if any each month directly to name of landlord or property management using public direct cash assistance funds or funds from employment.
3. The rent assistance payment is considered an interest-free loan between the Resettlement agency, Insert Name, and Tenants.
4. The duration of this agreement for partial rent assistance is 3 months, or until the Tenants secure employment and are able to cover the entire monthly rent, whichever comes first.
5. Tenants agree to repay the loan to the Resettlement agency, Insert Name, with monthly payments of $100.00, beginning 2 months after the Tenants have been employed.
6. Tenants agree to sign a month-to-month lease directly with the name of the landlord or property management, and agree to be responsible for all utilities

_____

Tenants Date

_____

Resettlement agency Insert Name Representative Date

Exhibit 2B | Reviewing the Lease

Refugee Housing
SOLUTIONS

REVIEWING THE LEASE

Prospective tenants, including newcomers, have the right to review — and counter — any stipulations in the lease. As you're reviewing the lease, pay close attention to the following:

- **Terms of the Lease**: Be sure that the lease term (six months, one year, or month-to-month) reflects the newcomers' needs and is indicated on the lease itself. Also take note of the lease's renewal policy. Further, if the move-in date is not on the first of the month, check to see if the rent will be pro-rated, which means tenants pay only for the days that they'll be living in the unit, not the whole month.

- **Occupants**: The landlord must confirm and agree to the number of people who will be occupying the unit. Ideally, all occupants' names should be listed, and all adults on the lease should sign.

- **Utilities**: Discuss with the landlord which utilities are included in the rent amount, if any, and make sure the lease clearly identifies them. Utility companies servicing the building will need to be notified of the tenants' move-in date to ensure billing begins on the correct date.

- **Breaking the Lease**: When moving into a new place, tenants rarely expect they'll have to break their lease early. But vacating prior to the end of a lease is actually not uncommon. Before newcomers sign, make sure they understand the penalties and consequences for breaking the lease. Also look for any move-out notice requirements. (For example, many landlords now require 30 or 60 days' notice before vacating.) Breaking a lease can have serious consequences on newcomers' finance, credit, and rental history, potentially impacting their future housing applications. This decision should not be taken lightly.

- **Guests**: Certain leases have specific rules surrounding guests; some leases prohibit overnight stays for more than a set amount of time.

- **How and When to Pay Rent**: Ensure that clients are fully aware of how and when to pay rent, as well as the consequences of late payments. Each landlord or property management company may collect rent differently. Ways to pay rent can include using an online portal that draws from the tenant's bank account, wiring money, mailing a check, or dropping off payment in person. Confirm with the landlord which payment method they prefer. If the landlord uses an online portal and the clients are unfamiliar with paying rent online, walk them through how to use the portal. If they are otherwise uncomfortable with that, speak with the landlord to see if they would

be open to receiving rent payments via check. Some states prohibit landlords from denying different forms of payment, so be sure to check your state's laws.

- **Renters Insurance**: Whether renters insurance is required by the terms of the lease, we recommend that all newcomers acquire it prior to moving in. Service providers can guide clients through the process of identifying renters insurance that is affordable and suits their needs.

- **Security Deposit**: Typically, security deposits are in the amount of one to two months of rent and serve to cover the cost of repairing potential damage to the unit (outside of normal wear and tear) that the tenant is responsible for upon move-out. If the unit is left in the same general condition as when the tenant moved in, the security deposit will be returned within 30 days of the move-out date.

- **Move-in Fees**: Some leases include move-in fees. Though these expenses (first and last months' rent, administrative fees, elevator rental fees, pet deposits, etc.) are typically non-negotiable, take note of them so the newcomer family is prepared to pay them on move-in day.

- **Personalization**: To avoid damage, property owners typically have strict rules surrounding tenant personalization (painting walls, hanging photos, installing bookshelves, etc.). Pay close attention to rules surrounding changes to the unit during occupancy.

- **Contact Information for the Landlord and Property Management Team**: Make sure to have the landlord or property manager's contact information and the best ways to reach them in emergency situations.

- **Maintenance Requests**: Take note of the lease's language on maintenance requests. How are both general and emergency repairs handled? In what timeframe? Confirm this process with the landlord prior to lease execution.

- **Any Additional Lease Details**: Service fees, returned check fees, parking, pet restrictions, specific trash and recycling guidelines, quiet hours, how to add or remove an occupant from the lease, use of common areas, restrictions on smoking or burning incense, etc. are all important details to cover with clients to ensure that no rules are accidentally broken.

Refugee Housing
SOLUTIONS

MOVE-IN GUIDELINES

After the newcomer has signed the lease, sponsors and case managers should begin prepping their clients for move-in. Newcomers typically don't arrive in the U.S. with many belongings, so it's the welcomers' job to ensure that the family has all they need to get started.

There are many aspects to preparing a home for newcomers. Most often, there are requirements that certain pieces of furniture and basic supplies be in the home prior to move-in. This Home Supply Checklist is a great resource to help you ensure that clients, and the home, are ready for move-in. While created for clients in the Reception and Placement (R&P) Program, this checklist is relevant even for clients who are not currently enrolled in R&P.

As you are orienting the newcomer family to their home, be sure to provide them with proper housing upkeep tutorials and any appliance guides, as some people may be unfamiliar with American appliances and general maintenance standards.

The following additional resources—available in a variety of languages—offer more details on apartment maintenance, safety, security, mail and notices, energy conservation, and what it means to be a good neighbor in the United States:

- Welcome to Your New Home
- Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange: Overview of Housing
- Settle In: Housing

Exhibit 2C | Sample Housing Walk-Through Checklist

Refugee Housing
SOLUTIONS

Sample Housing Walk-Through Checklist

During a housing walkthrough, prospective renters — or those conducting the search on their behalf — should be sure the unit meets the general standards below. This checklist is not a compliance tool for any specific grant or program; always reference your grant agreement and terms for specific program requirements. This is a starting point, not a comprehensive list. Feel free to add any additional checklist items as determined necessary. Document any issues and capture any damage to the unit with photographs.

What to look for	Requirement Met? (Yes/No)	Needs Follow Up?
All Rooms		
The unit is free from visible, bare electrical wires		
Interior paint is in good condition (not peeling or flaking)		
All walls are free of cracks		
Rooms are free of pest/insect or rodent infestation (or signs of infestation, such as rodent droppings)		
Rooms are clean and sanitary (free of mold and unsanitary odors)		
Air conditioning and heaters work		
All doors and windows work		
All lights, light switches, and ceiling fans (if present) work and are in good condition		
All outlets work (test them by bringing a phone charger and plugging it into each outlet)		
Unit has enough living space for each person according to local policies/standards		
Unit has enough bedrooms or sleeping areas for the whole family		
Bathrooms		
Areas under sinks are free of mildew, mold, and leaks (and signs of leaks, like water damage)		
Sinks and showers work and have enough water pressure		
Sinks and showers can run hot water		
Toilet flushes		

Refugee Housing
SOLUTIONS

Kitchen		
Oven and broiler work		
All burners on the stove work		
Refrigerator and freezer doors seal		
Kitchen sink runs hot water and has enough water pressure		
Dishwasher (if present) is free from odors and mildew		
Microwave (if present) works		
Bedrooms and Common Areas		
Locks on all doors work		
Windows are insulated properly and have locking features. (Some states require childproof locks on windows that are on the second floor or higher. Check your state's regulations to make sure all the windows follow your state's rules.)		
There are jacks for cable, internet, and phone connections		
Washing machines and dryers (if present) work and are free of odors		
Thermostat works		
All lights work		
Safety Features		
There are working smoke detectors in or near each bedroom, by the front door, and near the kitchen		
There are working fire extinguishers		
There are working carbon monoxide (CO)/radon detectors. (Some states require these detectors, while in other states tenants must supply their own. Check your state's regulations.)		
Hallways/common areas have fire safety features (alarms, sprinklers, etc.) if the unit is located within a building complex		
Emergency escape route(s) have been identified and are accessible		

Refugee Housing
SOLUTIONS

Garbage		
There are easy-to-access places for storing and throwing away garbage		
Disability Accommodation		
Housing is free of, or allows removal of, architectural barriers to the extent possible		
Housing otherwise accommodates known disabilities to the extent possible		
Overall Assessment		
All elements of this housing checklist are in acceptable and working condition		
Overall housing situation is safe, sanitary, and in good condition		

_____ _____

Signature of employee conducting walkthrough Date

_____

Print name

Exhibit 2D | Home Safety

HOME SAFETY

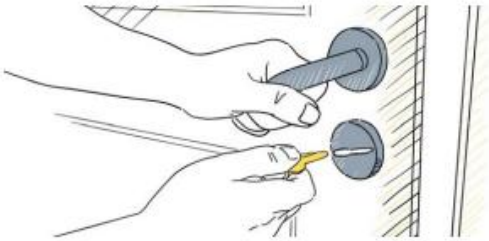
English Version

Knowing how to manage home safety is important – for you, those you live with, and your neighbors.



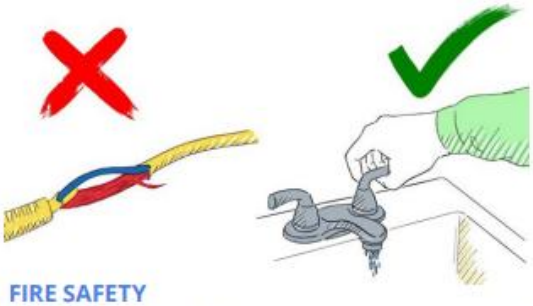
BASIC HOME SAFETY

When you move into your new home, spend time meeting your immediate neighbors and other people who live nearby. When you're familiar with your community, it is easier to notice if something is out of place or if there are strangers who you don't recognize.



To keep everyone safe, lock outside doors at all times. Do not allow strangers into your home. Close and lock your windows when you're not home.

If you're away from home for a long time, consider using a timer to make a light or TV turn on and off automatically. This can make it seem like you're home, which can help prevent strangers from entering your house.



Finally, use and maintain appliances and bathroom facilities as instructed. For example, don't use damaged electrical cords and turn sink, shower, or bath water off completely when not in use.

FIRE SAFETY

To protect your home from fires, know how to use your fire extinguisher and understand how smoke detectors work. If you rent, your landlord must provide working smoke detectors and a fire extinguisher. *Never* remove smoke detector batteries. If your fire detector beeps, change the battery.

Here are some other fire safety tips:

- Make a fire escape plan with your family and practice it. Also, test your smoke detectors regularly.
- Don't leave stove top burners, hot plates, ovens, or portable space heaters on unattended. Never use your stove top or oven for heat. Don't place items close to space heaters.



- Never leave burning candles or incense unattended.
- If you have a clothes dryer, regularly clean the lint filter.
- Don't leave washers or dryers running when you are not home.
- Keep lighters and matches away from children.





CALLING 9-1-1

Know how to call 9-1-1 for emergency assistance if something life-threatening happens and needs immediate police, firefighter, or emergency medical support. Here are some examples of when you should call 9-1-1:

- You can't stop a fire with your extinguisher.
- Someone at home has trouble breathing, faints and cannot be revived, or has had a severe accident.
- A stranger is trying to break into your home or is threatening your family.





By following these home safety tips, you can create a safe and comfortable living environment for you and your family.

Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange

For more information, visit Settle In at settleinus.org.

This resource was created in partnership with Refugee Housing Solutions. Refugee Housing Solutions is a project of Church World Service under an agreement paid for by the U.S. Department of State.

Exhibit 2E | Utilities (We Energies)

According to WE Energies, “We provide affordable, reliable and clean energy to more than 2.3 million customers in Wisconsin.”

Reading your We Energies bill

“Your energy bill has information to help you understand your energy use, billing, and payment. The sample bill below highlights each section.” WE Energies

Bill sections

1. Contact and emergency phone numbers.
2. Bill date, account number, next meter read date, amount due, and payment due date.
3. Customer name and service address.
4. Account summary with usage and cost-comparison graphs.
5. Activity since the last bill, including previous balance and payment, and current charges and balance.
6. Electric use.
7. Natural gas use.
8. Payment stub to include with payment.
9. Amount due and due date on the payment stub.
10. Payment mailing address.

we-energies.com

1 24-Hour Customer Service 800-242-9137
24-Hour Electric Emergencies 800-662-4797
24-Hour Gas Emergencies 800-261-5325

2 Bill Date	Account Number	Next Meter Read Date	Amount Due	Payment Due Date
07/25/2024	0123456789-00003	08/27/2024	$207.58	08/16/2024

3 Customer Name JOHN Q CUSTOMER
Service Address 123 MAIN ST
NEENAH WI 54956-1802

Activity Since Last Bill

06/25/2024	Previous Balance	$186.02
06/28/2024	Payment	-$186.02
	Balance	$0.00
	Total Current Charges	$207.58
	Total Current Balance	$207.58

5

Electric Service

Residential Electric Service Rg1

6 Meter NZT012434

Actual Reading 07/25/2024	74312	
Actual Reading 06/25/2024	-73344	
Total Electric Use	968 KWH	

Energy Charges/Credits		
Customer Charge	30 Days at $0.49315	$14.79
Energy Charge	968 KWH at $0.17154	$166.05
Other Service Charges/Credits		
Environmental Control Charge	968 KWH at $0.00056	$0.54
State Low Income Assistance Fee		$3.15
Taxes		
WI State Tax	5% of $181.38	$9.07
	Subtotal:	$193.60
	Electric Service Total:	$193.60

7

Gas Service

Residential Gas Service (WEGO) Rg-1

Meter 01234567

Actual Reading 07/24/2024	3197	
Actual Reading 06/24/2024	-3191	
Total Gas Use	6 CCF	

6 CCF x 1.05.0732 = 6.3 Therms

Local Distribution Service		
Customer Charge	30 Days at $0.33000	$9.90
Distribution	6.3 Therms at $0.32420	$2.04
Gas Supply Service		
Base Gas	6.3 Therms at $0.50030	$3.15
PGA	6.3 Therms at -$0.32020 (6/30 Days)	-$0.40
PGA	6.3 Therms at -$0.27460 (24/30 Days)	-$1.38
Taxes		
WI State Tax	5% of $13.31	$0.67
	Subtotal:	$13.98
	Gas Service Total:	$13.98

Messages

Our records show that the following individuals are responsible for this bill: JOHN Q CUSTOMER.

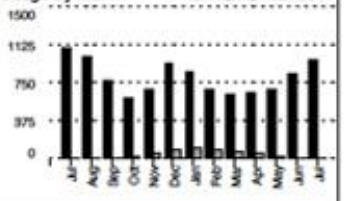
4

Account Summary
Bill Period: 06/25/2024 to 07/24/2024

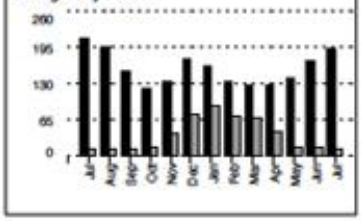
	Jul 2024	Jun 2024	Jul 2023
Billing Days	30	33	32
Avg Temp	71°F	67°F	73°F
Heating Deg Days	7	51	0
Cooling Deg Days	201	111	241
KWH Used	968	833	1094
Avg KWH / Day	32.3	25.2	34.2
Therms Used	6.3	7.4	5.2
Avg Therms / Day	0.2	0.2	0.2
Utility Gas Cost	$0.50	$0.50	$0.50

Graphs

Usage by Month — Therms, KWH



Charges by Month



Please return this stub with your payment.

ACCOUNT NUMBER: 0123456789-00003

9

Amount Due By	08/16/2024	$207.58

Please write your account number on your check

Amount Enclosed

8

JOHN Q CUSTOMER
123 MAIN ST
NEENAH WI 54956-1802

10 We Energies
PO Box 1125
Glenview IL 60025-8125

01234567891234567890 0123456789

Section 3 Landlords Partnering with Refugees

Housing staff should have a list of previously identified landlords, renters, and community partners within their community to place new arrivals. Below are tools and samples to help strengthen and build landlord relationships.

Working with Landlords

- **Be strategic** about your placements
  - Clients will have a range of individual needs and situations
- **Think like a salesperson**
  - Advocate for newcomer housing, "sell" your program, and emphasize landlord benefits
- **Target "medium-sized" landlords**
  - Identify landlords according to the number of units owned/managed
- **Establish a landlord advisory group**
  - Contact your local Chamber of Commerce or landlord organization to see if they can help

Benefits of Renting to Refugees

- **Case manager support** for both tenant and landlord
- **Secured rent payment** supported through initial programs or benefits
- **Recognition** as a community partner in resettlement
- Provide **SMART** outreach



Wisconsin Landlord Responsibilities

- **Fair housing:** Discrimination is illegal; housing cannot be denied because of race, religion, national origin, family status, or disability
- **Written leases:** required for rental agreements longer than one year
- **Safe housing:** the home should be free of hazards and follow housing/building codes

    - It is the landlord's responsibility to provide safe and habitable housing and to address environmental and health hazards in the home. Examples are:
        - Mold - fungi formation
        - Lead - a highly toxic material that can cause lead poisoning
- **Security deposit:** returned minus deductions within 21 days of moving out
- **Evictions:** a legal written notice that goes through the court process

Resources for Landlords

- **Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA):** Affordable housing programs. www.wheda.com
- **Wisconsin Rental Assistance Program (WERA):** Helps cover rent and utilities for eligible tenants.
- **Local Community Action Agencies:** Provide rental counseling and support.
- Refugee Housing Solutions
    - For Landlords - Refugee Housing Solutions
        - https://refugeehousing.org/resources/housing-provider-frequently-asked-questions-renting-to-newcomers-and-refugees/
        - https://refugeehousing.org/resources/landlord-toolkit/
        - https://refugeehousing.org/resources/an-overview-on-renting-to-newcomers/
        - https://refugeehousing.org/resources/landlord-opportunities-renting-to-newcomers/

Exhibit 3A | Wisconsin's "Renting to refugees" handout

Renting to refugees

Local resettlement agencies can support landlords and property managers who provide housing to refugee families.

Accepting alternate ID

Landlords can accept Customs and Border Protection documents as proof of identity when applying. Documents include the I-94 status document and travel letter with photo.

Verifying income

Local resettlement agencies can provide housing partners with a detailed summary of refugees' income.

Offering shorter lease terms

Shorter lease terms (such as 3-month, followed by month-to-month) give both landlords and refugee tenants a degree of flexibility and security.

Contact your local refugee resettlement agency

Fox Valley, Chippewa Valley, and Sheboygan

world relief WISCONSIN
(920) 231-3600
worldrelief.org/wisconsin/

Green Bay

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Green Bay
(920) 272-8234
catholiccharitiesgb.org

Madison

JSS of MADISON Caring. Connections. Solutions.
(608) 442-4081
jssmadison.org

Wausau

ECDC Multicultural Community Center
(715) 907-7082
www.ecdcwausau.org

Milwaukee

HANAN RELIEF GROUP
(414) 800-4168
hananrrg.org

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF WISCONSIN
(414) 225-6220
iiwisconsin.org

Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, Inc.
414-246-2300
lsswis.org



Renting to Refugees

Refugees & asylees

Refugees and asylees flee their home countries out of fear of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, or political/social affiliation.

Building a new life

Local resettlement agencies connect refugees to resources needed to start their new lives and become self-sufficient:

- Job placement
- Financial coaching
- U.S. law education
- English classes
- Tenant responsibilities
- Transportation/ transit
- Community engagement



Fair housing for refugees

Refugees are admitted to the United States with permanent, legal documented status.

Despite their permanent legal status and verifiable income, many refugees face housing discrimination.

Fair housing laws prohibit discrimination based on national origin, race, religion, and familial status. Possible indicators of discriminatory practices include:

- Refusing to rent to someone because they do not speak English
- Inquiring about someone's citizenship because of how they look, talk, or dress
- Asking someone to remove religious clothing or symbols
- Threatening or harassing someone because of their national origin, race, religion, familial status, or any other protected class
- Enforcing restrictive occupancy standards

Accepting refugee tenants

If I change my screening practices for refugees, is it compliant with the Fair Housing Act?

According to HUD guidelines, housing providers may alter their typical tenant screening process to enable refugees to be eligible for housing. This could include, for example, accepting alternative documents to verify ID, income, and background.

These modifications may be allowable as long as they are made for all people regardless of their national origin or any other protected class.

METROPOLITAN MILWAUKEE FAIR HOUSING COUNCIL

Contact MMFHC for more information about fair housing and renting to refugees:

(414) 278-1240

fairhousingwisconsin.com

Exhibit 3B | Renting to Refugees and Eligible Newcomers | Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
Renting to Refugees and Eligible Newcomers

The U.S. Government assists refugees and other eligible newcomers with resettlement support services as they begin to rebuild their lives in the United States. This FAQ answers questions that landlords and property managers may have about renting to refugees and other eligible newcomers.

About Refugees and Other Eligible Newcomers

A **refugee** is a person who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Refugee resettlement is a durable solution for individuals who have left their country, cannot safely return home, and need permanent resettlement to a third country. The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is managed by the U.S. Department of State and works in consultation with other federal government agencies, state, and local partners to resettle refugees and Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders. The USRAP provides a pathway for resettlement to the United States under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

The United States welcomes other eligible newcomers through other humanitarian immigration pathways. Eligible newcomer populations include **asylees** (individuals granted asylum in the United States), **Cubans and Haitians** granted entry to the United States**, Afghan and Iraqi SIV holders** who supported the U.S. mission in Afghanistan and Iraq, **victims of human trafficking**, certain **Afghan humanitarian parolees**, and certain **Ukrainian humanitarian parolees**.

All refugees and eligible newcomers are lawfully present in the United States. Resettlement provides an opportunity to start anew and pursue a life of safety and dignity without fear of violence or persecution.

Does the Federal Government Support Refugees and Eligible Newcomers?

Yes. Government, public-private partnerships, non-profit, faith-based, and community-based organizations join efforts to support refugees in their transition to the United States.[1] The State Department places refugees in locations throughout the United States in collaboration with national resettlement agencies, which have more than 340 affiliates across the country, to support refugees and other eligible newcomers. Once an individual or family is placed in a local community, they are assisted with a variety of initial services to help position them for successful integration. They also can receive support through longer-term enrollment in state and local services that support material needs, including housing, that are programs and services funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).

While State Department funding is focused on the first 30 to 90 days after refugees arrive, ORR funds resettlement services for up to five years to facilitate eligible newcomers' path to self-sufficiency. In addition to refugees, ORR also serves eligible

[1] Department of Health and Human Services. Find Resources and Contacts in Your State | The Administration for Children and Families (hhs.gov).

newcomers including asylees, Cuban and Haitian Entrants, Iraqi and Afghan SIV holders, victims of human trafficking, certain Afghan Humanitarian Parolees, and certain Ukrainian Humanitarian Parolees.[2]

Supportive services for refugees and newcomers through the State Department and ORR may include, but are not limited to:

- Case management
- Job readiness and employment placement services
- English language instruction and interpretation services
- Cultural and community orientation
- Time-limited cash and medical assistance
- Orientation that includes home maintenance and budgeting
- Support from federal agencies, state and local agencies, resettlement staff, volunteers and/or community groups to help mitigate issues or communication challenges.

Are Refugees and Eligible Newcomers Screened to Enter the United States?

Refugees and eligible newcomers receive background checks from the U.S. Government:

Yes. Refugees undergo mandatory and rigorous security vetting by the U.S. Government, including biometric and biographic security checks, medical exams, and interviews with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Other eligible newcomers, such as humanitarian parolees and asylees, also are screened and vetted by the U.S. Government; and federal agencies, such as USCIS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), or the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), issue documentation of their legal status.

Many refugees and other eligible newcomers may not have a state ID or a Social Security number (SSN) immediately after arrival, which means a landlord may not be able to run a background check. However, refugees will have documentation of their legal status from the U.S. Government.

Refugees and other eligible newcomers have documentation of their legal status:

When a refugee is admitted to the United States, DHS provides them with a Form I-94, Arrival/Departure Record. This is evidence that they are legally in the United States and, for refugees, does not expire. Other eligible newcomers also have documentation from the U.S. Government showing that they are lawfully present in the United States. A newcomer can present a Form I-94 card or paperwork such as a Global Boarding Letter issued by DOS as proof of their identity and legal status.

An individual who is granted asylum in the United States (an asylee) also will receive a Form I-94 from DHS. Their Form I-94 will contain a stamp or notation, such as "asylum granted indefinitely" or the appropriate provision of law (8 CFR § 274a.12(a)(5) or INA § 208) to show their employment authorization. It also will contain an official letter stating that they have been granted asylum.[3] Other eligible newcomers may have immigration classifications such as humanitarian parolee, Special Immigrant, Amerasian, or lawful permanent status. There are various ways humanitarian parolees may prove their

[2] Department of Health and Human Services. ORR. Fact Sheets: Eligibility & Benefits.
[3] USCIS. 7.3 Refugees and Asylees | USCIS.

identity and that they are present under an authorized period of parole; some examples include documents accepted for Form I-9, which are outlined on the USCIS website.[4] ORR provides a list of Status and Documentation Requirements for the ORR Refugee Resettlement Program.

Are Refugees and Eligible Newcomers Authorized to Work?

Yes. Refugees might not have a job as soon as they arrive, but they are authorized to work immediately upon their arrival in the United States and are assigned a case manager from the local resettlement agency to support their job search. In addition, refugees receive assistance to help with rent and basic needs. A promissory note and/or letter of support from a refugee resettlement agency may outline the financial support a housing applicant will receive from the local resettlement organization and state or federal agencies. Many other eligible newcomers are also authorized to work (immediately or after a certain period), are eligible for job development services, and may also be eligible to receive time-limited rental and cash assistance.

Credit Checks

If a landlord or property manager requires credit checks at admission, may the landlord or property manager forgo credit checks for refugees?

Landlords and property managers may generally forgo credit checks as long as they do not violate the Fair Housing Act, which prohibits discrimination in housing related transactions on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), familial status, and disability.[5] For example, if a credit check exception is made because of immigration status (like refugee status), the exception must apply equally to all those in the immigration status and not only to those of a certain national origin.

It is a best practice for landlords and property managers to review their credit check policies (and other background check policies) to ensure that they do not discriminate unlawfully because any protected class under the Fair Housing Act. Landlords and property owners may use alternate forms of verification to assess the ability of a prospective tenant to pay rent without traditional credit, whether refugee, humanitarian parolee, or otherwise. For example, if a resettlement agency provides full rental payment for the refugee family, other verification of ability to pay would be unnecessary since the purpose of the credit check is to provide a reasonable basis for believing that a tenant's rent will be paid.[6] Finally, note that some HUD-subsidized housing providers may be prohibited from refusing to rent to applicants with a lack of credit history, as opposed to poor credit history.[7]

[4] USCIS. Form I-9 Acceptable Documents | USCIS.

[5] One exception to this general rule is in the public housing context. Depending on the circumstances, public housing authorities may not have complete discretion in forgoing a general policy of performing credit checks. Housing Discrimination Under the Fair Housing Act | HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

[6] For more information on credit requirement exemptions in public housing and Housing Choice Vouchers, please see Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Public and Indian Housing's Questions and Answers Regarding Housing Assistance for Refugees Office of Public and Indian Housing.

[7] Department of Housing and Urban Development. Occupancy Requirements of Subsidized Multifamily Housing Programs. Chapter 4. Waiting List and Tenant Selection.

What Other Fair Housing Considerations Should Landlords and Property Managers Be Aware Of?

Housing providers' treatment towards refugees and eligible newcomers must be free from discrimination. The Fair Housing Act ("Act") (42 U.S.C. §§ 3601-19) protects people from discrimination when they are renting or buying a home, getting a mortgage, seeking housing assistance, or engaging in other housing-related transactions. The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), familial status, and disability. Laws prohibiting national origin discrimination make it illegal to discriminate because of a person's birthplace, ancestry, culture, or language. This means people cannot be denied equal opportunity because they or their family are from another country, because they have a name or accent associated with a national origin group, because they participate in certain customs associated with a national origin group, or because they are married to or associate with people of a certain national origin.[8] Landlords and property managers should also note that discrimination on the basis of limited English proficiency can violate fair housing laws.[9]

For information on fair housing issues regarding occupancy limits, affirmative marketing, and language access please visit the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) General FAQ. Information on fair housing issues regarding tenant screening can be found here. Information on fair housing issues regarding the advertising of housing, credit, and other real estate transactions through digital platforms can be found here.

More Information and Resources

For more information and resources about renting to refugees and eligible newcomers, please refer to the Landlord Toolkit from Refugee Housing Solutions. To learn more about the economic contribution of refugees and asylees read a 2024 report published by HHS: The Fiscal Impact of Refugees and Asylees at the Federal, State, and Local Levels from 2005-2019.

For more information on credit requirement exemptions in public housing and Housing Choice Vouchers, please see HUD's Office of Public and Indian Housing's Questions and Answers Regarding Housing Assistance for Refugees and Parolees. HUD's PIH Guidebook has a complete list of eligible immigration statuses for HUD-subsidized housing. You can also find an explanation of how and when non-citizens are eligible for programs that provide assistance necessary to protect life or safety here. HUD also provides information about resources for renting to refugees and other eligible newcomer populations on their Refugees and Other Newcomer Populations webpage.

[8] Department of Justice. Federal Protections Against National Origin Discrimination.
[9] Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of General Counsel. Guidance on Fair Housing Act Protections for Persons with Limited English Proficiency.

Refugee Housing
SOLUTIONS

HOUSING PROVIDER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Renting to Newcomers and Refugees

This FAQ guide is designed to help landlords and other housing providers understand the unique aspects of renting to newcomers, including refugees and asylum seekers. It addresses common questions and concerns, providing practical information to facilitate a smooth and inclusive experience for all.

- **Who are newcomers?**
  - The term "newcomers" generally refers to people who have recently arrived in the U.S. to resettle from another country. This term encompasses various groups, including but not limited to:
    - **Refugees:** Individuals who have fled their home country due to religious or ethnic persecution, civil unrest and conflict, or other violence and have been granted asylum in the U.S.
    - **Asylum Seekers:** People who are in the U.S. or at its borders and have requested asylum risks and harm in their home country but have not yet received a decision on their asylum claim.
    - **Humanitarian Parolees:** Individuals who are granted temporary entry into the U.S. for urgent humanitarian reasons, such as medical treatment or other emergencies, but do not have a formal immigration status. This currently includes Ukrainians, Afghans, Haitians, Venezuelans, Nicaraguans, and Cubans.
    - **Temporary Protected Status (TPS) Holders:** Immigrants from countries experiencing ongoing armed conflict or environmental disasters who are allowed to stay in the U.S. temporarily.

  Resource: Understanding resettlement pathways and different support systems by population

- **What kind of support do newcomers receive?**
  - Newcomers receive various forms of support including financial aid, housing assistance, and public health and social service benefits. The specific support varies by their newcomer status. For example, refugees typically get cash assistance, temporary housing, and access to federal benefits; whereas asylum seekers may receive emergency cash assistance and temporary housing, but have limited access to public health and social service benefits. See below for additional resources:

Landlord Toolkit

Understanding resettlement pathways and different support systems by population

Fact Sheet on Renting to Refugees and Other Eligible Newcomers

Federal Housing Program Eligibility for Newcomers

This resource shows which newcomer groups are eligible for different federal housing programs.

- **How reliable are newcomers as tenants?**
  - Newcomers are often highly motivated to maintain stable housing, having waited years — or even generations — for resettlement. Grateful for the opportunity to build a new life in a safe environment, they are committed to being responsible tenants. For some, renting in the U.S. may be their first experience living in Western-style housing, and they tend to take their tenancy obligations seriously.
  - Soon after arrival to the U.S., most newcomers receive both formal housing orientation and hands-on guidance when they move into a rental property. Almost all have ongoing support from a resettlement agency case worker or team.
  - Many newcomers receive rental assistance and other financial support from resettlement agencies or local nonprofits to help them meet their initial and some ongoing financial obligations. The U.S. government also provides resettlement services to refugees and other eligible newcomers. This fact sheet and FAQ from the federal government addresses common questions housing providers may have about renting to newcomers.

  🔗 **Watch:** A landlord shares their positive experience renting to newcomers

- **Do newcomers have rental history or credit scores?**
  - Newcomers will likely not have a U.S. rental history or credit score, but resettlement agencies can provide references and vouch for their reliability. Further, newcomers' identification documents are officially cited by the federal government as acceptable substitutes to use in vetting tenant applications: U.S. Federal Government Fact Sheet & FAQ on Renting to Refugees and Other Eligible Newcomers
  - Landlords and property managers may skip credit checks for refugees and other eligible newcomers, provided it complies with the Fair Housing Act. Any exception to credit checks must be applied equally to all individuals within the same newcomer status regardless of their race, color, national origin, religion, sex, family status, or any disability. NOTE: It is advisable for landlords to review their credit check and background check policies to avoid unlawful discrimination and to get ideas to consider alternative verification methods to assess a tenant's ability to pay rent.

- **What identification do newcomers have once they resettle?**
  - Newcomers with different immigration statuses will have different identification. Examples are these:
    - ⇢ **Travel Letter:** Provided to refugees without passports for international travel to the U.S. This serves as photo ID until they receive their Social Security number (SSN) and card, an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and/or a driver's license.
    - ⇢ **EAD and SSN:** Refugees and Special Immigrant Visa holders are eligible to work without an EAD; other newcomers need an EAD to begin working. SSNs are applied for within a week of a newcomer's arrival if they are eligible to work and typically arrive within two weeks.
    - ⇢ **I-94:** An immigration document with an A-number (case number) that remains with a newcomer until they become a citizen; it has no photo.

- **Passports/National ID:** Some newcomers arrive with a passport or national ID from their home country, and this can be used as photo ID.
- **Travel Assurance:** Most newcomers receive this document before arrival in the U.S. to serve as a temporary ID for securing housing until other identification is available.

Resource:

- More information about different forms of documentation newcomers may have when applying for housing:
  - Rental Application Essentials: How Newcomers Can Use Alternative Documents

- **What can I do to make my rental process newcomer-friendly?**
  - **Online and Paper Applications:** Provide both options, as some newcomers may be unfamiliar with technology or face challenges with automated systems due to different documentation.
  - **Multilingual Application Processes:** Translating applications into common newcomer languages like Spanish, Swahili, Arabic, Dari, Pashto, Ukrainian, and Russian can help ease the process for non-fluent English speakers.
  - **Flexible Lease Terms:** Short-term leases with options to extend can be beneficial as newcomers settle in and stabilize their income
  - **Flexible Payment Options:** Offering in-person payment options is helpful as new arrivals may not have had time to open a bank account. Also, offering incremental rent payment options – like bi-weekly payment – can be helpful too, especially if a household has wage earners who are paid at different times.
  - **Reasonable early termination fees:** This concession can be extremely valuable so newcomers can avoid extra financial outlays while still settling in.

  Resource: How to make rental operations newcomer-friendly

- **What happens if a newcomer breaks their lease?**
  - Much like any other tenant, if a newcomer breaks their lease, they must face agreed financial penalties like paying the remaining rent or an early termination fee. A landlord may take legal action as allowed by the lease. However, a landlord may be better served to negotiate an early lease termination without penalties to avoid the hassle of legal action. This consideration will be particularly helpful for tenants who have an opportunity to reunite with family members in another building or town.

- **How can I communicate effectively with newcomer tenants?**
  - Resettlement agencies and other community organizations often provide language support and can help facilitate communication between newcomers and landlords. Additionally, visual aids and translated rental applications and lease agreements can be helpful to communicate more easily.

- **What cultural considerations should I be aware of?**
  - **Communication Styles:** Many cultures have different approaches to communication, and many prefer indirect ones, so patience and clarity are key.
  - **Household Size:** In some cultures, extended families live together and/or have many children, and these families will be applying to rent. When accommodating larger households, it is important to ensure that you as an individual landlord or your company's occupancy standards comply with local policies and regulations.
  - **Cultural Adjustment:** Newcomers may be unfamiliar with Western housing norms, so providing clear instructions on maintenance, waste disposal, safety measures, and other household responsibilities can help.
  - **Gender Roles:** Gender-based dynamics vary across cultures. In some cases, women will not feel comfortable interacting directly with male landlords or maintenance staff, so offering alternative communication channels is important.
- **What should I do if there are maintenance issues or concerns?**
  - Treat maintenance issues as you would with any tenant, ensuring timely and effective communication. Resettlement agencies always brief the newcomers they support on the importance of timely communication about maintenance requests, including information on what is urgent and what is routine. The resettlement agency, another nonprofit, and/or neighbors with better English language skills can assist if there are language barriers or other challenges.
- **What are some common terms used in resettlement?**
  - **R&P (Reception and Placement):** Refugees who are vetted overseas before being granted asylum come to the U.S. through the State Departments R&P program with an initial 90 days of support provided upon their arrival. It includes support for temporary housing, orientation to the new community, and assistance with immediate needs such as setting up a bank account, applying for a Social Security number, accessing healthcare, registering children for school, and understanding local services. This support is typically provided by resettlement agencies.
  - **Welcome Corps:** The Welcome Corps is a program that allows private citizens and community organizations to sponsor refugees and help them settle in the U.S. It provides a way for individuals and groups to directly support refugee resettlement by offering financial and social assistance, helping them integrate into their new communities.
  - **Virtual R&P (Virtual Reception and Placement):** Virtual R&P is a model that delivers services remotely rather than in-person. This approach includes virtual orientations, online assistance, and remote case management to support refugees, especially during circumstances where in-person services are challenging or impossible.
  - **U.S. Ties:** These are individuals like family members or friends, or community groups who are in the U.S. These ties assist in the resettlement process by providing social support, help finding and paying for housing, and offering other integration assistance like job search support, enrolling children in schools, etc.

- **Cash-Based R&P:** Cash-Based R&P is a variant of Reception & Placement where refugees receive a cash allowance to cover their initial living expenses, rather than receiving in-kind services and goods. This approach provides refugees with the ability and flexibility to manage their own resettlement to the U.S.
- **Cultural Orientation:** Cultural orientation is offered before newcomers in the R&P program arrive to the U.S. and continues when they arrive. For other newcomers, CO happens only after arrival. In all situations, CO involves information-sharing and training. and education to help newcomers start to understand and adapt to U.S. social norms, multi-cultural environments, laws, etc.
- **Ethnic and Community-Based Organizations (EBCO):** EBCOs are nonprofit or community organizations that specifically support their own ethnic or cultural groups. They offer services with familiarity about the distinct needs of their communities, including programs that support integration and adaptation to new environments.

Exhibit 3D | Sample checklist to assure landlords of the benefits of renting to refugees

LANDLORD BENEFITS CHECKLIST

Why do landlords like working with [name of your organization]?

About this Tool: This checklist is a tool to advertise your program to potential landlords. The benefits listed are just examples of services provided by housing search agencies based on interviews with providers around the country. Be sure to modify the list so that it represents your program accurately.

User Tips: As part of your marketing materials, it is important that the piece looks professional and catches people's attention. You may want to customize the checklist by including your organization's name and logo. Similarly, you could use graphics, photos (e.g., a photo of one of your program participants talking to one of your participating landlords), and/or colored paper to give it more of a polished look. This checklist could be mailed out to landlords in your community along with other program materials (e.g., a program brochure, newsletter, or annual report). Or your housing advocates can use it as a "leave behind" piece when they meet with prospective landlords. Finally, send copies over to your local landlord organization to distribute at their next meeting. Even better, see if you can do a short presentation at their next meeting!

[INSERT 2-3 SENTENCE INTRODUCTION ABOUT YOUR PROGRAM.]

Landlords gain several benefits from participating in our program. Consider the following advantages:

- ✓ Eliminate advertising costs. Working with our program gives you access to a pool of ready-to-rent tenants. Just call us when you have a vacant unit, and we'll immediately match you with a client looking for housing.

- ✓ "Smart" renters. Our clients have attended training on topics such as personal budgeting, understanding rental agreements, housekeeping and general apartment maintenance, and being a good neighbor.

- ✓ Damage/security deposits. Our organization aims to help individuals get back up on their feet. We have found that many low-income clients can afford the monthly rent but have difficulty saving enough money for their security deposit. As a result, we help clients put together this one-time payment.

- ✓ Clients have access to time-limited subsidies. Again, our organization aims to help individuals get back on their feet. As a result, eligible clients receive a subsidy to help them cover the first three months of their rent. This allows clients some time to stabilize and build an emergency fund for the future.

- ✓ Guaranteed rent payments. Our clients are pre-screened and have a stable source of income. However, should one of our clients run into a problem, we have a pool of funds set aside to help them through rough spots. We will also co-sign leases in some situations to virtually eliminate any risk to landlords.

- ✓ Clients are attached to needed services. Some of our clients have special needs, but we work with them on an ongoing basis to make sure they have the support they need to succeed. We work with clients to correct past mistakes and prevent future problems, and through our network of partners, clients have access to an array of supportive services.

- ✓ Problem prevention through regular home visits. Our case managers conduct regular home visits to ensure that clients are stabilized in their new environments, that their jobs are going well, and that they are getting the support they need. Regular follow-up with clients allows us to identify and address problems early before they become irreparable.

- ✓ Neutral party to mediate problems. Despite the best efforts, problems are sometimes inevitable. However, when problems arise, it can be reassuring to know that there is someone to call. We care as much about our relationship with our landlords as we do our clients. We need everyone to make our program work. The job of a case manager is to be a neutral party, ensuring that everyone is treated fairly and that problems are resolved quickly and impartially. This includes help evicting a client (and covering eviction costs) when warranted.

- ✓ Satisfaction from helping others. Everyone deserves a safe and affordable place to live. Some people make mistakes, but everyone deserves a second chance. By helping house our clients, you are playing an integral role not only in helping individuals take charge of their lives but also in making your community a better place to live.

Interested but still unsure? Give one of our participating landlords a call!

- [NAME, NUMBER]

- [NAME, NUMBER]

  [Note: Remember to ask for permission before listing someone's name, and make sure they will give your program a good reference!]

Please feel free to call us at any time. We'd love to hear from you!

- [PROVIDE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION