

Refugee Assistance

RAMP

Morris Partners

*A Bridge to Assist People to
Cross From One Life to Another*

**A Worldwide Refugee Crisis and The Local Response -
Refugee Assistance Morris Partners: An Evaluation**

Maggie Dubyk
Mary Rizk

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1. Executive Summary

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees published a Global Trends Report on Forced Displacement in 2017 estimating that 68.5 million people are currently displaced worldwide. Though the refugee crisis is global, the Syrian Refugee Crisis received immense attention with the start of the Arab Spring in 2010, a series of uprisings in the Middle East that demanded immediate governmental and bureaucratic change in hopes of a bigger presence of democracy.

Resettlement varies around the world, but it is also subjected to high rates of change within the United States based on the administration in office. For example, the number of refugees accepted into the US has fluctuated between the Barack Obama and the Donald Trump presidencies, based on how important they deemed the agenda on refugee resettlement.

Refugee resettlement is a federal mandate that could be done through a public-private partnership, the state government, or the Wilson-Fish model. Each of these methods provides similar services but are administered differently. In some cases, states take care of the distribution of benefits while grassroots organizations help families integrate, and in other cases, the state takes complete responsibility. Under the circumstance that the state chooses to not participate, the Wilson-Fish program offers assistance that is an alternative to state participation.

Based on the state they will reside in, the families are matched to one of the nine resettlement agencies, and the agency assists them in the first 90-days of their arrival to the US. They offer a case manager that will follow up on a timeline with a checklist of items such as receiving green cards, finding a home, and getting employment. In some areas where resettlement is high, co-sponsorship has emerged in the form of organizations that will assist the agencies in integrating the families.

Refugee Assistance Morris Partners is a non-profit organization that acts as a co-sponsor for the agency Church World Service. The organization's mission is to *"assist vetted Middle Eastern and other refugee families to transition to productive lives of dignity, safety and hope in the Morris County area of New Jersey."* Assistance is provided through a range of services that include providing basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter upon arrival followed by health, social, educational, and employment services as families begin to settle in New

Jersey. RAMP's central objective is to gradually work towards sustainable independence for each of the families they host **(1)**. As of 2018, RAMP has hosted two refugee families, one from Syria and the other from Afghanistan. RAMP's services have provided both families with furnished homes, clothing, food supplies, transportation, employment assistance, English training, as well as support obtaining social services.

The purpose of the evaluation of RAMP was to assess both the organization and participants' perception of the services provided, identify the services impacts and gaps, and provide constructive recommendations on how the services can be altered and improved to further the organization's success. This evaluation was achieved by conducting research on the refugee resettlement process in New Jersey and reviewing its programs and services, interviews with other agencies involved in refugee resettlement in the state of New Jersey, RAMP staff, RAMP volunteers, as well as their participating refugee families.

As RAMP continues to evolve they have requested that researchers evaluate the services they have provided for both of the families they have sponsored in order to support RAMP's plan to co-sponsor a third family in the coming year. Throughout the evaluation process, the researchers focused on the aspects of sustainability, effectiveness, methodology, and administration within the organization. To collect data for the evaluation, the researchers conducted several interviews with RAMP, the refugee families, RAMP volunteers, and other refugee resettlement organizations. The data collected from these interviews were then analyzed in order to provide recommendations for RAMP as they move forward.

2. Refugee Crisis



The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees published a Global Trends Report on Forced Displacement in 2017 estimating that 68.5 million people are currently displaced worldwide. According to the UNHCR, a displaced person is someone who has been forced from their home due to persecution, conflict, or generalized violence and fall under three general categories; refugee, asylum seekers, and internally displaced peoples. Of the 68.5 million people currently displaced, 25.4 million are identified by the UNHCR as refugees. The UNHCR defines a refugee as “someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group” **(2)**.

After being forced from home, refugees experience a diverse range of circumstances, including being placed in encampments in their country of origin, shifting in and out of camps between and within borders, and/or living amongst the host countries’ communities. A refugee’s experience and level of support are influenced by an interplay of complex factors including geographic location, political relations, conditions and resources of the refugee and the host country, as well as the level of engagement of the international community **(2)**.

Throughout history, several countries have opened their borders to refugees with aims to provide safety and security. The US has been offering support to refugees since 1975 and has resettled over 3 million refugees, making it the leading country in refugee resettlement worldwide. The US first began admitting refugees as a response to the wave of European refugees following World War II and has continued to support the resettlement of thousands of refugees from various regions as a response to global conflicts **(3)**. In order to manage and standardize the fluctuating influx of refugees, the US government passed the Refugee Act of 1980. This act outlines the obligations, procedures, and legal basis involved in the current US refugee admissions and resettlement process. Emerging from this act was the creation of the Refugee Admission Program, comprised of various government agencies and non-profit organizations, of which oversee the refugee admissions and resettlement process. Every year the President of the United States submits a Presidential Determination, which once approved by various government bodies, determines the regional allocations of refugees, the processing priorities for resettlement, as well as admission ceilings **(3)(4)**.

In 2010, a pattern of pro-democracy upheavals within the Middle East came about, also known as the Arab Spring. Beginning with Tunisia, many Arab nations revolted against their dictator or dictator-like regimes in hopes of better futures, specifically for the poor in their countries. One of the most notable revolutions of this time was in Egypt where protest for social freedom and a more trustworthy government took place. While for Tunisia and Egypt the protests resulted in democratically run elections, not all nations were just as fortunate. In countries like Libya, Yemen, and Syria, the up rises turned into civil wars. The Syrian Refugee Crisis emerges onto the International Stage in 2011, displacing over 12.6 million people by the year 2017 (5).

As seen in Figure 1, the admission ceilings under the Bush and Obama administrations from the years 2006-2016 remained relatively steady, averaging at about 75,000 per year. In 2017 the refugee admission ceiling rose to 110,000 under the Obama administration as a response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis (6).

Table I. Refugee Admissions Ceilings and Regional Allocations, FY2006-FY2017

Region	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017
Africa	20,000	22,000	16,000	12,000	15,500	15,000	12,000	15,950 ^a	17,500 ^b	20,400 ^c	27,500 ^d	35,000
East Asia	15,000	16,000 ^e	20,000	20,500 ^f	18,000 ^g	19,000	18,000	16,600 ^a	14,700 ^b	17,300 ^c	14,000 ^d	12,000
Europe and Central Asia	15,000	6,500	3,000	2,500	2,500	2,000	2,000	650 ^a	1,000	2,300 ^c	4,000	4,000
Latin America/Caribbean	5,000	5,000	5,000 ^h	5,500 ^f	5,500 ^g	5,500	5,500	4,400 ^a	4,300 ^b	2,300 ^c	1,500 ^d	5,000
Near East/South Asia	5,000	9,000 ^e	28,000	39,500 ^f	38,000 ^g	35,500	35,500	32,400 ^a	32,500 ^b	27,700 ^c	38,000 ^d	40,000
Unallocated	10,000	11,500	8,000 ^h	—	500 ^g	3,000	3,000	—	— ^b	— ^c	— ^d	14,000
Total ceilings	70,000	70,000	80,000	80,000	80,000	80,000	76,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	85,000	110,000
Actual admissions	41,223	48,282	60,191	74,654	73,311	56,424	58,238	69,926	69,987	69,933	84,995	N/A

The support of Syrian refugees and refugees from various other regions under the Obama administration came to a halt in January 2017 following President Donald Trump's election. The Trump administration issued Executive Order 13769 on January 27th, 2017 that called for a 120-day suspension on the Refugee Admissions Program. The Trump administration stated that the purpose of the 120-day suspension was to complete a review of the Refugee Admission Program to further protect the nation from national security threats. The executive order states;

“Numerous foreign-born individuals have been convicted or implicated in terrorism-related crimes since September 11, 2001, including foreign nationals who entered the United States after receiving visitor, student, or employment visas, or who entered through the United States refugee resettlement program.”

To address these concerns, the executive order called for a review of policies, procedures, and programs related to refugee admissions and resettlement (7). The 120-day ban gained national and global attention as protests erupted in cities and airports around the world. In February the federal court halted the 120-day suspension, but this did not stop the Trump administration from dramatically decreasing the refugee admission ceilings for the year 2018. On October 4th, 2017 the Trump administration issued a Proposed Refugee Admission Report that cut the refugee admissions ceiling down to 45,000, less than half the 110,000 ceiling from the previous year under the Obama Administration (8).

In response to the Trump administrations decrease in support for refugees there has been a wave of advocacy for refugees as well as an increase in media coverage pertaining to the refugee crisis and the US government's responses. Advocacy groups and communities both internationally and within the US began speaking out in disapproval of the policies implemented by the Trump administration. Amnesty International, one of the largest human rights organizations in the world, referred to Trump's new policies on refugees as a "license to discriminate disguised as a 'national security measure'" (9). The United Nations also released a statement: (10)

US travel ban: "New policy breaches Washington's human rights obligations" – UN experts

The public concern for the human rights violations and lack of support being offered by the US government has led to an increase in the number of non-profit organizations and community groups who have initiated an effort to support refugee admissions, resettlement, and policy reform. The support smaller and more localized non-profits are able to provide refugees are not only influenced by global and federal politics, but also by state, county, and township politics. For example, in 2015 the governor of New Jersey, Chris Christie, informed the federal government that the state of NJ would no longer be accepting or supporting refugees (11). Despite Christie's unwillingness to support refugees, the state does not have the authority to deny refugee entry, however, they can deny their support. Thus, in states like NJ, the support of refugees is left in the hands of non-profit organizations to support refugee resettlement.

As global conflicts and political situations continue to change and remain unpredictable, the status of refugees, their admission into countries like to US, as well as the refugee resettlement process will continue to be an ongoing challenge faced by international, national, and local organizations seeking to support

refugees. For any of these organizations, it is crucial to have a holistic understanding of the processes behind refugee status, admissions, and resettlement.

3. Refugee Resettlement Process

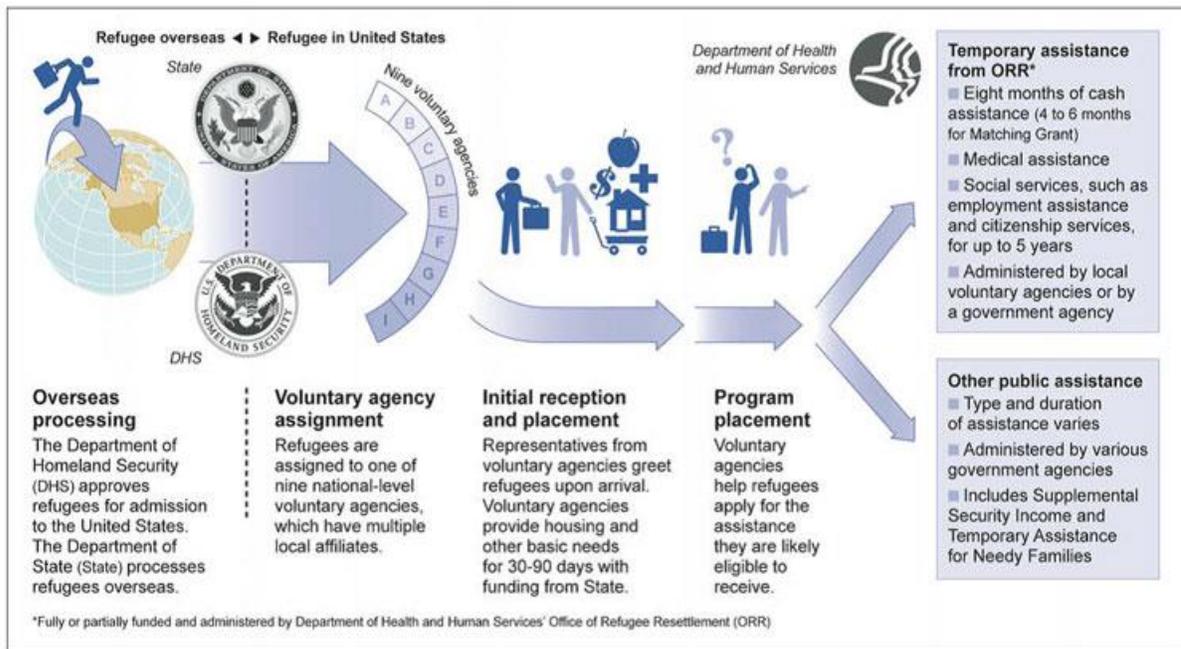
The United States defines a refugee as an individual, who has been, or fears, persecution due to religion, nationality, political views, race, or affiliation with a particular group. An individual is eligible for refugee status in the US given that they meet the definition stated above as well the following criteria; a) they are located outside of the US b) they are of humanitarian concern c) they are not resettled in another country e) they are admissible into the US. Refugee status differs from asylum status, where the individual fleeing prosecution must be present at a port of entry or already in within the US **(12)**.

To be admitted into the United States as a refugee, an individual must first be defined a refugee by the UNHCR and then be referred to the US for resettlement by the United Nations, US Embassy, or NGO. Once a refugee is referred to the US, their documentation is held and reviewed by the United States Resettlement Support Center (RSC). The documentation is then sent to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for admission approval. Prior to DHS approval, a refugee must undergo a series of intensive security and medical screenings as well as in-person interviews **(13)**. This extensive admission process can take anywhere between 18 months to three years.

Once a refugee is approved they are issued an I-94 document by Customs and Border Protection upon arrival. The I-94 is essentially a document that proves a refugees legal status in the United States, eligibility for employment, and can be used to apply for a Social Security number after 90-days of arrival **(14)**. Another way refugees are admitted into the US is under the status of a special immigrant. Special immigrants are admitted into the US with a Special Immigrant Visa, which automatically provides accepted individuals with a green card and permanent residency status **(15)**. Eligibility requirements for the special immigrant program depend on various categories an individual is placed in. One of these categories consists of Afghan and Iraqi nationals who have been employed by the US government in Afghanistan or Iraq for at least one year. Admitting Afghan and Iraqi nationals into the US on SIV's emerged in 2006 as a response to the dangerous working conditions employees were exposed to in support of the US war efforts. Although those who enter the US with SIV's are

admitted under different circumstances, they are resettled through the same program as those admitted with refugee status **(15)**.

When a refugee is admitted into the United States the DHS matches the refugees with one of the nine domestic resettlement agencies: Church World Service, Ethiopian Community Development Council, Episcopal Migration Ministries, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, International Rescue Committee, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services, and World Relief. Once a refugee is matched with one of these agencies, the agency assists them in the first 90-days of their arrival to the US. In order to make this possible, the agencies are provided information about the refugees from the RSC, which is used to best determine where a refugee is most likely to succeed in resettling, depending on the resources of both the refugee and the available host communities. For example, the refugee will be asked if there are any relatives living in any part of the US, and this could be a factor in the placement of the family. Once these details are sorted, the appropriate agency is responsible to have every family meet certain standards and provide specific services. These include finding and furnishing a home for the family, providing a culturally appropriate meal, assisting in the acquisition of green cards, treating any medical needs, as well as finding employment for all members in the family who are eligible to work. This is listed in a very clear timeline-like contract between the agencies and the Department of State **(16)**.



Source: GAO; National Atlas (globe).

However, it must be noted that this process is not the same in every US state. Refugee resettlement is a federal mandate, but states have the option on whether or not to participate. Consequently, there are three ways in which a refugee can be resettled within the US. The first is through a public-private partnership, where states take care of the administrative factors while local voluntary organizations help refugees integrate into the community by providing assistance in the forms of funds alongside social services. The second is through the state government, where any form of assistance is provided by the states' social services and labor force offices. The third is the Wilson-Fish model, which is a program that is alternative to state participation and traditional state administration of funds and other forms of assistance to resettling refugees. It provides them with cash and medical assistance along with social services. Depending on whether or not a state chooses to be the administrator in this process, each state's resettlement process runs differently. For example, twelve states currently use the Wilson-Fish program, while others are in transition between one method and another, while others are under the state or public-private methods **(17)**.

With the continuous need for resources, the concept of co-sponsorship has emerged. Many resettlement agencies, including CWS and IRC, use this system in order to make the resettlement process as effective as possible. Co-sponsors are small groups or organizations that offer resources to refugee families beyond the 90-day support offered by the federal government and resettlement agencies. The co-sponsors are provided with the family's information and a case-specific timeline to guide them in the resettling process. According to Rebecca Liberato, a case manager for CWS, the agency has worked with at least five co-sponsors, excluding others whom they have trained. Co-sponsors are often given specific families to sponsor in terms of providing the refugees with an integration that is as smooth as possible within their community. The availability of co-sponsors and local resources are factors that go into the assigning of families through the case-by-case process.

4. Refugee Resettlement and Support Programs

When a refugee is approved status in the United States they are eligible for various programs and grants that support their resettlement process. While some of these programs are federal, others are state specific programs. As long as they are eligible, refugees are not restricted to a limited number of programs and

grants. The programs and grants most commonly awarded to refugees are listed below in the order of priorities upon arrival.

1. Reception and Placement Program (R&P). The R&P is a federal program that supports refugees for up to 90 days following their arrival. The program includes a grant of \$2,075 per refugee that is given the resettlement agency to provide basic needs upon arrival such as; shelter, food, hygiene, and clothing **(16)(18)**.
2. Matching Grant Program (MG). The MG program is a grant that provides cash assistance, employment services, and case management to support refugees in becoming economically self-sufficient. Program eligibility lasts between 120-180 days and must be awarded to refugees currently associated with one of the nine resettlement agencies contracted with the US federal government **(19)**.
3. Refugee Cash Assistance and Medical Assistance Programs (RCA & RMA). The RCA and RMA programs are designed to provide cash and medical assistance to refugees for up to 8 months after arrival. The amount of assistance is determined based on the size of the family as well as income level. Once a family's income exceeds \$839 per month they are no longer eligible **(20)**.
4. Refugee Social Services Program (RSS). The RSS program is awarded to states in the form of a grant to support refugees in finding employment who have been in the US for less than 5 years **(21)**.
5. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The TANF program provides cash assistance and job training to low-income families for up to 5 years. To receive a monthly stipend, families must show that they are working full-time, searching for employment, or volunteering **(22)**.
6. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, is a program that provides low-income families with financial assistance to purchase groceries. Cash is placed on a debit card that is given to the family and refilled on a monthly basis **(23)**.

5. Refugee Assistance Morris Partners

As noted above, RAMP is an organization that seeks to support the resettlement of refugee families in New Jersey with a central goal for the families to become self-sufficient. Mary and Gerry Gannon of Morris County stumbled upon the viral image of Alan Kurdi, 3, washed up on the shore of the Greek island Kos in 2015. This image was the Gannon's initial motivation to support the Syrian refugee community in whichever capacity they could.



Nilüfer Demir, 2015

Having been successful in hosting a Vietnamese family in the 1970's, as a response to the wave of Vietnamese refugees, the Gannon's felt that sponsoring refugee families would be one of the best ways they could help. To reach out for additional support and find out more information on sponsoring a refugee family, the Gannon's first reached out to Voice of the Faithful in New Jersey, a Catholic-based organization who is dedicated to promoting peace and justice in society. With the support of Voice of the Faithful, the Gannon's continued outreach by writing letters and speaking with various mosques and churches located in Morris and Somerset Counties. To begin the process of sponsoring a refugee family, the Gannon's reached out to four of the nine refugee resettlement agencies contracted with the federal government; Catholic Charities, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, International Rescue Committee (IRC), and Church World Service (CWS). Of the four agencies, only the IRC and CWS had a family

sponsorship option. The Gannon's chose to work with CWS given that they seemed to be more helpful and responsive throughout the initial stages. In April of 2016, a CWS member came to speak with the Gannon's along with the various other community organizations and groups that expressed interest in supporting the Gannon's. Once the Gannon's determined that sponsoring a family would be possible, they began to organize committees.

Committees were established by aligning community volunteer's interests and experiences with a particular resettlement task set out by CWS. Once the committees were established, the committee members and the Gannon's decided on the formal title of Refugee Assistance Morris Partners (RAMP) for the organization. To formalize the relationship with CWS, RAMP filled out a co-sponsorship form (see in appendix 13.1) that was essentially a written agreement to adhere to CWS's 90-day resettlement requirements. Once RAMP was approved as a co-sponsor they were requested to attend training sessions with CWS where they would be given a briefing on the resettlement process, assigned a family to sponsor, and educated on cultural differences. The first family sponsored by RAMP was a family from Syria who had been admitted into the US with refugee status. In order to prepare to resettle the family, RAMP assigned one family coordinator to the family who worked alongside RAMP's various committees; housing, furniture, clothing, welcome and orientation, education, health and social services, financial assistance, social connections, transportation, employment, and public relations. Financially, RAMP planned on supporting the family solely on donations from the various organizations and religious groups to whom they had reached out.

Once RAMP felt prepared to support the Syrian family financially and had built a team of committees, they felt they were ready to take on a second family. The second family assigned to RAMP by CWS was a family from Afghanistan on a Special Immigrant Visa. CWS supported RAMP in the first 90 days of resettling the families by providing a 3-month timeline as well as financial support through the R&P federal grant program. CWS also assigned a case manager to RAMP's families who assisted in ensuring basic needs were met upon arrival, that the family was provided proper housing, and performed check-ins on the families after the first week and after the first 30 days of resettlement.

As of September 2017, RAMP estimates they have received over \$120,000 in donations and have contributed \$59,400 to support both Family A and Family B. Although RAMP is not registered as a nonprofit organization, they currently hold 501(c)3 status with Community Foundation of New Jersey, a nonprofit

organization located in Morristown, NJ. The 501(c)3 status is supported by RAMP's relationship with Community Foundation of New Jersey as a 'special fund.' As a special fund of a nonprofit organization, RAMP's donations are managed and held by a registered nonprofit, allowing their donations to be tax-deductible.

As of summer 2018, RAMP is continuing to support both families in becoming self-sufficient and is currently organizing coordinators, committees, and volunteers with a plan to take on a third refugee family in the coming year. RAMP plans to remain a co-sponsor of CWS, and maintain their 501(c)3 status with Community Foundation of New Jersey. RAMP hopes to expand their support beyond families from the middle-eastern region and begin to support refugees from various other regions across the globe.

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