

REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS – SOME FACTS

Refugees:

- The legal definition of a “refugee” is a person “who has been persecuted or is afraid of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. For more information about refugees see: <http://refugees.org/explore-the-issues/refugees-facts/>
- The US resettles refugees who have fled their countries and have applied for refugee status. The current laws of the United States (*Refugee Act of 1980*) requires a minimum of 50,000 refugees to be allowed into this country each year. Any numbers above 50,000 is up to Presidential discretion.
- Before a refugee can enter the United States she/he is investigated thoroughly. It takes 18 months to two years for the approval process to be completed.
- USCRI-Albany (US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants-Albany Office) is the regional office that resettles refugees in the Capital Region. Since 2005, about 4,000 refugees resettled in our geographic area. (In 2016, 500 refugees resettled in the area.)
- Refugees come from all over the world. Most recently, refugees who have resettled locally are from Bhutan, Burma, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and the Congo.

Immigrants:

- A foreign citizen seeking to immigrate generally must be sponsored by a US citizen or lawful permanent resident immediate relative(s), or prospective US employer and have an approved petition before applying for an immigrant visa.
- Beyond temporary visas (e.g. visitor or student visa) there are a wide variety of visas, each with their own requirements, including family-based, inter-country adoption, employment-based and special immigrant visas.
- Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) are available for people who worked with the US armed forces or under Chief of Mission authority as a translator or interpreter in Iraq or Afghanistan. Currently, only fifty visas are offered a year. A number of SIV holders have resettled in the Capital Region.
- For more information on immigrant visas see US Visas – US Dept. of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs: <https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/immigrate.html>

Permanent Resident status (“Green Card” holder):

- A permanent resident of the United States can:
 - Work and live in the US permanently.
 - Travel outside of and return to the US
 - Petition for other family members to receive green card status.
- Permanent residency grants a person asylum from deportation.
- Permanent residents can be arrested and deported for violation of any of the terms of residency including committing crimes, and/or acts of terrorism or espionage.
- A person may also lose permanent resident status by moving to another country permanently.
- If a permanent resident stays outside of the US for an extended period of time (e.g. one or more years) it is advisable to apply for a re-entry permit. For more information on maintaining permanent resident status see US Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS): <https://www.uscis.gov/green-card/after-green-card-granted/maintaining-permanent-residence>