



# Refugee Misconceptions

## Correcting Misconceptions about Refugee Resettlement in North Dakota

There are several misconceptions in our community and around North Dakota about refugees and refugee resettlement. Here are some of the most common, along with accurate information.

Do the refugees who come to North Dakota even want to be here?

**Yes, the refugees who come to North Dakota want to be here, for many reasons.** The first is that 9 times out of 10, a refugee is reuniting with family members already living here. Once they are legally admitted, refugees have the right to live wherever they want in the United States. Those who choose to remain in Fargo-Moorhead tell us they do so for many are the same reasons we all choose to live here: job availability, proximity to family and what the community has to offer.

Refugees refuse to learn English.

**LSSND refugee clients are required to take English classes.** For the most part they do so happily and willingly. English language proficiency is recognized by resettlement experts as a key to success for refugees, and the vast majority of refugees understand its importance. Issues do arise related to transportation to classes, childcare and difficulty coordinating with work schedules. We work with our clients to address these issues as best we can so they can continue to further their learning.

Refugees don't pay taxes.

**Refugees pay taxes from the moment they arrive in the United States.** All federal and state income taxes, as well as local and state sales taxes, apply to refugees as they do to anyone else who is a legal resident of the United States. Once established, many new Americans begin saving to purchase a home, just like other Americans aspire to do. As homeowners, they pay property taxes just like other members of the community.

Refugees get free apartments.

**Refugees are required to pay for their housing, just like anyone else.** They usually use funds from the refugee cash assistance they receive from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for their first few months in the country, but as soon as they are working this resource goes away. They might also qualify for low-income housing assistance, but they must meet the same criteria as any other person who is living legally in the United States. In addition, they have to wait for rental assistance to become available, which can take months to years in North Dakota.

Refugees get free cars when they get to the United States.

**Refugees do not receive free cars.** They are responsible for their own transportation, and many rely on public transportation options, especially in the first several months/years they are here. In Fargo, they can receive a bus pass from LSSND for up to four months so they can get to and from their English classes. Many refugees save up to buy a car as soon as they are able to do so but, in addition to the cost, English is also important to their transportation success as it is necessary to get a driver's license.

Refugees who come to North Dakota become long-term welfare recipients.

***No data we are aware of supports the assertion that refugees are reliant on public assistance for the long term.***

What we do know is the longer someone is in the country, the more their household incomes rise. Locally, we know the vast majority of refugees LSSND resettles are employed soon after they arrive. Some refugee families, like other lower-income families living in the community, qualify for certain social service programs. These supports are important for many lower income families who are working to make ends meet. However, a large part of our job is to help the families we work with get jobs and achieve self-sufficiency as quickly as possible.

Does Lutheran Social Services assist with asylum seekers?

***Generally, no.*** An asylum seeker comes to the United States through a different system than a refugee and those individuals are not part of our refugee resettlement program.

LSSND administrators profit from payments received to resettle refugees.

***Neither LSSND nor its leaders profit from per-refugee payments from the federal government.*** The fact is LSSND has typically operated this program at a loss each year. LSSND receives a one-time reimbursement for each refugee from the U.S. Department of State to help defray administrative costs of the program, and can bill federal refugee contracts for direct costs of service. LSSND makes up the rest through donations.

Many refugees are violent people who were criminals in their home countries.

***Refugees are screened intensely before they are allowed to enter the United States.*** In fact, we know more about refugees than you know about a person you might allow into your home to perform routine maintenance. The truth is refugees go through an intensive, exhaustive screening process that involves the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and, in some cases, other U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

Refugees are more likely to commit crimes and are increasing our crime rates.

***There is no data to support the suggestion that refugees commit more crimes compared to any other group of people.*** Law enforcement agencies do not gather or track immigration status when arrests are made. If you have questions, contact your local Police Department's Cultural Liaison Officer.