



Head Start Opportunities for Families with Refugee Status



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Helping families with refugee status find stable employment and child care for their youngest children are among your toughest challenges as a refugee resettlement agency.

Head Start is an ideal partner to support families with refugee status as they integrate into their new communities. Head Start’s mission is to help children get ready to succeed in school and in life, epitomizing the hope and promise of a better life in America for which people with refugee status risk their lives.¹ The program’s strengths-based approach—focusing on one’s abilities rather than shortcomings—resonates with the refugee community, which is continually working to shed its “traumatized” label.^{2,3} And Head Start has long recognized that equity and inclusion are critical to effective community engagement.⁴

¹ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/comms-fact-sheet/office-head-start>

² <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/building-partnerships-guide-developing-relationships-families/strength-based-attitude>

³ <https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/stories/q-far-being-traumatized-most-refugees-are-surprisingly-resilient>

⁴ <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/culture-diversity-inclusion-equity-cdie-spotlight-human-resource-systems>

About the National Head Start Association and Fors Marsh partnership

The National Head Start Association (NHTA) and communications and research firm Fors Marsh, a certified B corporation, have teamed up to help local Head Start programs like yours establish meaningful connections with refugee communities.

The goals are simple:

- 1** Enroll more children from families with refugee status in Head Start
- 2** Employ more people with refugee status in Head Start programs



About the Toolkit

With input from several Head Start programs and refugee resettlement agencies, NHSA and Fors Marsh created a toolkit of communications materials to help refugee resettlement agencies achieve the two goals on the previous page.

The toolkit includes:

- Fact sheets on the [benefits of working at Head Start](#) and [enrolling children in Head Start](#)
- [Posters](#), [flyers](#), [social media ads](#), and [text messages](#) to encourage people with refugee status to apply for jobs and enroll their children at Head Start

Acknowledgements

The toolkit builds upon other efforts to foster collaborations between Head Start programs and refugee resettlement agencies, including the Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services' [Refugee Resettlement-Head Start Collaboration Toolkit](#) and [Enhancing Childcare for Refugee Self-Sufficiency: A Training Resource and Toolkit](#).

The toolkit also incorporates recommendations from multiple sources, including the Migration Policy Institute's [Challenges in Accessing Early Childhood Education and Care for Children in Refugee Families in Massachusetts](#) and [Providing a Head Start: Improving Access to Early Childhood Education for Refugees](#); and the Tent Foundation's [U.S. Employers' Guide to Hiring Refugees](#).

About Head Start

Head Start is an early childhood education model committed to 360-degree development of the whole child—providing a strong foundation to help set children up for a lifetime of learning and growth in school and in the wider world.

Head Start preschool programs serve the families of children ages 3 and 4. Early Head Start programs serve pregnant women and the families of children from birth through age 2.

Head Start services are delivered in child development centers (schools with classrooms), in the home, or in a family child care setting (such as an in-home daycare) in every state through [1,700 agencies](#) that tailor the federal program to the local needs of families in their service area.

Head Start Services and Employment Opportunities Available to Families with Refugee Status^{1,2}

The Head Start Promise

Compared with their peers who don't attend Head Start, children enrolled in Head Start programs are more likely to:

- ✓ Graduate from high school and attend college
- ✓ Have improved social, emotional, and behavioral development
- ✓ Be better prepared to be parents themselves

Early Learning. Educators teach young children what they should know and be able to do to succeed in grade school. This includes age-appropriate instruction in:

- Listening, understanding, and using language to communicate with others
- Reading and writing
- Reasoning, memory, problem-solving, and thinking skills that help young children understand and organize their world

Educators and the adults in the children's lives also help them with:

- Using their senses to gather and understand information and respond to the world around them
- Developing their gross and fine motor skills, which refers to moving their bodies and grasping, holding, and manipulating small objects
- Learning to keep themselves safe and healthy
- Creating and sustaining meaningful relationships with adults and other children
- Expressing, recognizing, and managing their own emotions and responding appropriately to others' emotions

Health. Children receive free health and development screenings, nutritious meals, and oral health and mental health support. Programs connect families with medical, dental, and mental health services, and ensure that children are receiving the services they need.

Family well-being. Parents and families are supported in achieving their own goals, such as housing stability, continued education, employment, and financial security. Programs support and strengthen parent-child relationships and engage families in children's learning and development.

Community partnerships. Head Start programs establish community partnerships to collaborate on supporting family needs, such as immigration and legal, as well as basic resources like housing, job searches and training, and more.

Eligibility. Many families with refugee status are likely eligible for Head Start. Families with household incomes at or below the [federal poverty level](#) qualify for Head Start; so do families eligible for [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\)](#), [Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\)](#), or [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) benefits. Head Start programs can also make certain exceptions for families who don't meet these criteria.

Children with refugee status may also qualify for immediate enrollment in Head Start if they meet the requirements of a federal law called the [McKinney-Vento Homelessness Act](#). This means that they don't need to prove income; they are categorically eligible for Head Start by virtue of meeting the definition of homelessness. Talk to your [local homeless education liaison](#) for help with determining a child's eligibility.

How to apply. Each Head Start program has its own application process. Typically, they gather information about the family's household and require the following documents to apply:³

- **Proof of the child's birth.** Children with refugee status who do not have a birth certificate, passport, hospital record, or baptismal record should be allowed to demonstrate proof with other official government forms that contain their name, date and place of birth, and names of their parents.
- **Proof of income.** Everyone who contributes to the household income must provide proof of income from the previous 12 months. Acceptable documents can include income tax forms, W-2 wage and tax statements, pay stubs, and federal benefit documentation (TANF, SSI, SNAP). Families accepted into a program must prove that they meet the income eligibility requirements each year.
- **Proof of residency.** Acceptable documents can include driver's licenses with a current address, utility bills, lease agreements, rent receipts, and tax bills.

Families may also be asked to provide the child's immunization records.

Find your local [Head Start program](#) for more information and to apply.

¹ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/comms-fact-sheet/office-head-start>

² <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/interactive-head-start-early-learning-outcomes-framework-ages-birth-five>

³ Based on a small survey of Head Start programs' stated application requirements.



Employment Opportunities

Head Start programs hire people with all kinds of work experience, education, and skills. Some of the jobs include:

- Teachers
- Teachers' assistants
- Classroom aides
- Infant/toddler caregivers
- Bus/van/truck drivers
- Cooks
- Cleaning/maintenance workers
- Accountants
- Data entry technicians
- Office assistants

Benefits of Working at Head Start

Head Start offers:

- **Flexibility**—Part-time, full-time, and volunteer jobs in and out of the classroom
- **Compensation**—Good pay and benefits
 - › Some programs offer year-round compensation and others offer compensation only during the school year
 - › Total benefits, such as health insurance, depend on the program location and whether you work full- or part-time
- **Comfort**—Safe, family-oriented, inclusive, and diverse work environments
- **Community**—Meet other parents, professionals, and people in your community
- **Assistance**—Help with meeting the needs of your family
- **Convenience**—The ability to work in the same place your child learns
- **Skills building**—Build communications and other skills on the job, including learning English as a second language
- **Advancement**—Professional development to
 - › Improve your skills in serving children and families
 - › Increase your earning potential
 - › Meet degree or certification requirements

As recipients of federal funding, Head Start programs are equal opportunity employers. That means they can't discriminate in employment decisions on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability, or genetic information.

Talking points on Head Start Educational and Employment Opportunities for Families with Refugee Status

- **Emphasize that Head Start provides comprehensive services for families with refugee status, and explain the benefits of early childhood education.** Head Start and Early Head Start are free service programs for families who are from diverse cultural backgrounds and who speak different languages. The programs provide support to families related to health, education, nutrition, and other social services. [Research shows](#) that children who participate in Head Start are better prepared for kindergarten and grade school, are more likely to graduate high school and go to college, and do better on a host of other outcomes when compared with children who are eligible for Head Start but don't participate.
- **Head Start encourages families with refugee status to apply for Head Start for their children.** While Head Start sometimes receives more applications than it has space for, it has ways of prioritizing children with refugee status. Head Start also supports the parents and families of enrolled children in achieving their own goals, such as housing stability, continued education, employment, and financial security.
- **Head Start often has job openings for both skilled and unskilled positions.** Head Start often needs teachers, teachers' assistants, classroom aides, infant/toddler caregivers, bus/van/truck drivers, cooks/cafeteria workers, cleaning/maintenance workers, accountants, data entry technicians, and office assistants.
- **A job at Head Start could help you meet the needs of your family.**

Worksheet: Overlaps and Gaps in Community Services

It can be helpful in your conversations with Head Start programs to identify areas of overlap and gaps in the services you both provide.

Services for Children and Families	What Head Start Provides	What the Refugee Resettlement Agency Provides	Timeframe for Refugee Resettlement	Person Responsible
Family case management				
Home visits				
Community assessment process				
Service coordination				
Family engagement				
Assistance with application for public benefits and services				
Health/mental health assessment for children, linking to services (immunizations, malnutrition, trauma)				
Enrollment				
Transition to public schools				
Services to parents (assist with economic security, housing, employment, and career development)				
High-quality early childhood education				
Child care while parents work				
Employment services geared to people with refugee status				
Deep relationships with ethnic community leaders to promote trust and family integration				
English-as-a-second-language training				
Access to less common languages for interpretation/translation				
Access to cultural expertise, consultations, and training about newly arrived populations				