



How to Employ People with Refugee Status at Head Start

Despite the fact that people with refugee status are authorized to work in the United States, they face many barriers to employment. If you can help applicants who are refugees overcome these barriers, your program could benefit considerably.

The benefits of employing people with refugee status include:

- ✓ **People with refugee status are ready to work.** They are immediately and permanently authorized to work in the United States. They do not require visa sponsorship.
- ✓ **People who are refugees and also of working age are plentiful.** Over three-quarters of people with refugee status are of working age (ages 25–64); not even half of the U.S.-born population is of working age.¹
- ✓ **People with refugee status undergo more intense background checks than typical employees.** They have been thoroughly vetted by the U.S. Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security.
- ✓ **People with refugee status tend to be highly motivated, flexible, and committed employees.** They possess a range of skills and backgrounds, are willing to work different shifts, and often stay with their employers for longer than other employees.^{2,3} Head Start programs with staff who are refugees report their appreciation for their staff’s willingness to work hard.⁴
- ✓ **People with refugee status are diverse.** They bring a range of perspectives, worldviews, and diversity. Hiring staff members with refugee status can lead to increased enrollment of children who are refugees.⁵
- ✓ **Hiring people with refugee status can come with tax benefits.** Your program may qualify for federal tax credits through the [Work Opportunity Tax Credit](#) if you hire a refugee who receives Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

Employment barriers for people with refugee status you can help overcome

People with refugee status may not be accustomed to the job application and interview process. Thoroughly explain your program’s hiring process and what to expect in an interview.

Some people with refugee status could have trust issues owing to their challenging and even traumatic pasts. Reassure job applicants with refugee status that you will not keep or misplace any of their documents; they can be hesitant to share documents if they do not have multiple copies.

Head Start requires that all potential employees pass a background check, including people with refugee status.

Qualified applicants with refugee status may have gaps in education or employment. Because they had to flee their home countries, they may have had to abandon their studies or

¹ https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/NAE_Refugees_V5.pdf

² https://www.lirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Tent_Guidebook_FINAL.pdf

³ https://www.tent.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/TENT_FPI-Refugees-as-Employees-Report.pdf

⁴ Listening session notes.

⁵ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/FCD-Morland-FINAL.pdf>

Disclaimer: The information provided here does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice. All information is for general informational purposes only.

careers, which they were likely unable to resume while displaced in refugee camps. They also may lack proof of their educational attainment or previous employment. People with refugee status often arrive in the United States with little more than the clothes on their backs; they likely had to leave behind their diplomas, certificates of study, and letters of reference when they fled their home country. Work with their refugee resettlement agency case manager, if they have one, to help track down this information.

Many people with refugee status will have an employment specialist or similar staff person assigned to them, specifically to help with employment. You can ask the refugee resettlement agency if they employ such a person and how to get in touch, so you can work together.

People with refugee status may have limited English proficiency. But many come to the United States speaking some English, and their English skills quickly improve. If your program offers English as a second language classes, reassure job applicants with refugee status that Head Start offers them. Work with their refugee resettlement agency case manager (or employment specialist), if they have one, to help with translations/interpretations.

Know your responsibilities as an employer and recipient of federal funding

Federal law requires Head Start programs (as recipients of federal grant funding) to be [equal opportunity employers](#). That means you can't treat job applicants and employees unfairly on the basis of:

- Race
- Color
- Religion
- Sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation)
- National origin
- Age (40 or older)
- Disability
- Genetic information

It's also [against federal law](#) in the United States for employers, including Head Start, to treat job applicants and employees unfairly because of their:

- Citizenship status
- Immigration status
- National origin

Section 1. Employee Information and Attestation: Employees must complete and sign Section 1 of Form I-9 no later than the **first day of employment**, but not before accepting a job offer.

Last Name (Family Name)		First Name (Given Name)		Middle Initial (if any)	Other Last Names Used (if any)	
Address (Street Number and Name)			Apt. Number (if any)	City or Town		State ▼
Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)		U.S. Social Security Number		Employee's Email Address		Employee's Telephone Number

I am aware that federal law provides for imprisonment and/or fines for false statements, or the use of false documents, in connection with the completion of this form. I attest, under penalty of perjury, that this information, including my selection of the box attesting to my citizenship or immigration status, is true and correct.

Check one of the following boxes to attest to your citizenship or immigration status (See page 2 and 3 of the instructions.):

1. A citizen of the United States

2. A noncitizen national of the United States (See Instructions.)

3. A lawful permanent resident (Enter USCIS or A-Number.)

4. A noncitizen (other than Item Numbers 2. and 3. above) authorized to work until (exp. date, if any) _____

If you check Item Number 4., enter one of these:

USCIS A-Number	OR	Form I-94 Admission Number	OR	Foreign Passport Number and Country of Issuance
_____		_____		_____

Signature of Employee _____ Today's Date (mm/dd/yyyy) _____

If a preparer and/or translator assisted you in completing Section 1, that person MUST complete the [Preparer and/or Translator Certification](#) on Page 3.

Figure 1. Section 1 of Form I-9 that all employees must fill out

Disclaimer: The information provided here does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice. All information is for general informational purposes only.

People granted refugee status in the United States have a right to work.

Form I-9 and E-Verify guidance

Federal law requires every person who works in the United States to fill out [Form I-9](#). That includes people granted refugee status.

Social Security numbers. A person granted refugee status might not have a Social Security number at the time they apply and accept a job. They can leave the space blank (See Figure 1). But they should amend their Form I-9 once they get their Social Security number. If you use [E-Verify](#), wait to create the E-Verify case until the worker has received a Social Security number. **People with refugee status can work while they wait for their Social Security number.**

Citizenship/immigration status. A person granted refugee status should put a checkmark next to “4. A Noncitizen” and write “NA” in the space where it asks for the expiration date of their authorization to work. **People with refugee status are permanently authorized to work.**

Proof of identity and permission to work. Form I-9 lists many documents applicants can use to confirm their identity and permission to work (see Figure 2). Head Start can’t ask applicants to provide:

- A specific document, even if the Head Start program uses E-Verify
- More documents than are required
- Different documents than are required

Head Start can’t reject any documents applicants provide that reasonably appear to be genuine.

If a document an applicant wants to use is lost, damaged, or stolen, they can provide the receipt to replace it from the agency that gave it to them. They should provide the replacement document within 90 days.

For more information

Learn more about the employment rights of people with refugee status at

www.justice.gov/crt/immigrant-and-employee-rights-section.

Learn more about the kinds of documents people with refugee status can use to prove identity and permission to work at

www.uscis.gov/i-9-central/form-i-9-resources/handbook-for-employers-m-274/70-evidence-of-employment-authorization-for-certain-categories/73-refugees-and-asylees.

LIST A Documents that Establish Both Identity and Employment Authorization	LIST B Documents that Establish Identity AND	LIST C Documents that Establish Employment Authorization
1. U.S. Passport or U.S. Passport Card	1. Driver's license or ID card issued by a State or outlying possession of the United States provided it contains a photograph or information such as name, date of birth, gender, height, eye color, and address	1. A Social Security Account Number card, unless the card includes one of the following restrictions: (E) NOT VALID FOR EMPLOYMENT (G) VALID FOR WORK ONLY WITH INS AUTHORIZATION (H) VALID FOR WORK ONLY WITH DHS AUTHORIZATION
2. Permanent Resident Card or Alien Registration Receipt Card (Form I-551)	2. ID card issued by federal, state or local government agencies or entities, provided it contains a photograph or information such as name, date of birth, gender, height, eye color, and address	2. Certification of report of birth issued by the Department of State (Forms DS-1352, FS-542, FS-242)
3. Foreign passport that contains a temporary I-551 stamp or temporary I-551 printed notation on a machine-readable immigrant visa	3. School ID card with a photograph	3. Original or certified copy of birth certificate issued by a State, county, municipal authority, or territory of the United States bearing an official seal
4. Employment Authorization Document that contains a photograph (Form I-796)	4. Voter's registration card	4. Native American Tribal document
5. For an individual temporarily authorized to work for a specific employer because of his or her status or parole: a. Foreign passport, and b. Form I-94 or Form I-94A that has the following: (1) The same name as the passport, and (2) An endorsement of the individual's status or parole as long as that period of endorsement has not yet expired and the proposed employment is not in conflict with any restrictions or conditions identified on the form.	5. U.S. Military card or draft record	5. U.S. Citizen ID Card (Form I-197)
	6. Military dependent's ID card	6. Identification Card for Use of Resident Citizen in the United States (Form I-173)
	7. U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner Card	7. Employment authorization document issued by the Department of Homeland Security
	8. Native American Tribal document	For examples, see Section 7 and Section 13 of the M-274 on uscis.gov/i-9-central
	9. Driver's license issued by a Canadian government authority	The Form I-796, Employment Authorization Document, is a List A, Item Number 4, document, not a List C document.
	For persons under age 18 who are unable to present a document listed above:	
	10. School record or report card	
	11. Clinic, doctor, or hospital record	
	12. Day-care or nursery school record	

Figure 2. Acceptable documents for proving identity and permission to work

Disclaimer: The information provided here does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice. All information is for general informational purposes only.