

COUNTRY
CHAPTER

ICE

ICELAND

BY THE GOVERNMENT OF ICELAND



Iceland 2016 Overview

Resettlement programme since: 1996	Selection Missions: Yes	Dossier Submissions: Yes
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Resettlement Admission Targets for 2016:

Admission targets for UNHCR submissions:	90 persons
Total Resettlement Admission Target:	90 persons

Regional Allocations for 2016:

Africa	
Asia and Pacific:	
Middle East and North Africa	90
Europe:	

Sub-quota features:

Designated sub-quota/acceptance for:	2016 Description, additional comments:
Emergency resettlement procedures	
Medical cases	
Women-at-risk cases	
Unaccompanied children	
Family Reunion (within programme)	
Other	

1. Resettlement Policy

Iceland has received groups of refugees for resettlement since 1956. Between 1956 and 2016 a total of 597 refugees have been resettled in the country as quota refugees. The **Icelandic Refugee Committee** was established in 1996 by the Government of Iceland and since then the State has overseen the reception of refugees annually or every second year as a part of the UNHCR Resettlement Programme. In 2007 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs announced the establishment of an annual quota of 25 to 30 refugees. The quota for 2008 was 29 individuals. Due to the financial crisis in Iceland in 2008, the quota for resettled refugees was reduced and in the year 2010 two families (six persons) were accepted as resettled refugees. The Icelandic Government announced in 2015 that they would increase the number of refugees to be resettled substantially due to an increase of refugees in the world. During 2015-2016, Iceland has approved to resettle around 90 persons from Syria. The first group arrived on the 19th of January 2016 and the second group on the 6th of April, in total 48 persons have arrived at the time of the revision of this chapter.

The Icelandic Refugee Committee is the consultative body on quota refugees. The **Ministry of Welfare** (former Ministry of Social Affairs), through the Icelandic Refugee Committee, is responsible for the selection, admission and integration of refugees in Iceland while working in close co-operation with other ministries concerned. The Icelandic Refugee Committee is comprised of members from the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Red Cross of Iceland.

2. Criteria for Recognition of Refugee Status Eligibility and Asylum

Refugees eligible for resettlement in Iceland are recognised as refugees according to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Statute of Refugees as well as regional instruments, and for security reasons cannot remain in their first country of asylum or return to their country of origin. Article 44 of the Icelandic Act on Foreigners also defines a refugee as a person who is not a refugee under the definition of the convention if there is reason to believe that this person will suffer the death penalty, undergo torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment should that person be sent back to their home country. The same applies to stateless persons.

There is no distinction made between the Refugee Status criteria for asylum-seekers and resettled refugees.

3. Criteria for Resettlement

Refugees eligible for resettlement in Iceland are refugees recognized under UNHCR's mandate and are described by the Act on Foreigners in Iceland. Cases should be submitted by UNHCR. The same criterion applies for asylum-seekers. Iceland resettles protection cases and has in recent years focused on particular vulnerable groups such as women at risk and medical needs.

Resettlement places are offered to all family members in a case that is submitted by UNHCR that are included in the core family, that is to say spouses and their children less than 18 years of age.

All cases that are submitted to Iceland are evaluated by the refugee committee and the Directorate of Immigration. There are no integration criteria or any assessments regarding medical needs.

4. Resettlement Allocations/Processing Priorities

The Government of Iceland decides the allocation of the quota in close consultation with the Ministry of Welfare (former Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security). The **Icelandic Refugee Committee**, uniting representatives from the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the Icelandic Red Cross, makes a proposal on the basis of the UNHCR assessment of overall resettlement needs. The Icelandic Refugee Council meets on average once per month, and decides upon the allocation of sub-quotas by region and category in co-operation with local authorities.

5. Submission and Processing via Dossier Selection

The processing of refugees in Iceland is mainly carried out through In-Country Selection; however in 2010-2016 the selection process has been via dossier selection. The selection of candidates was made through refugee status determination on the basis of the Resettlement Registration Forms (RRFs) submitted by the UNHCR to the Icelandic Refugee Committee. The Icelandic Refugee Committee notified UNHCR of its decisions as soon as the Icelandic Government approved the Committee's suggestions.

6. Submissions and Processing via In Country Selection

6.1 Selection mission policies

The destination of the annual interview mission is decided by the Government of Iceland according to recommendations from the Refugee Committee in close consultation with UNHCR.

6.2 Preparations

Since 2010 UNHCR has sent the Icelandic Refugee Committee RRFs regarding individuals and families recommended by the respective UNHCR office. The numbers of cases that are sent are higher than the ones that will finally be offered asylum in Iceland. The committee studies all the cases thoroughly and has in some cases interviewed the ones that are likely to be offered asylum in Iceland. The interviews are most often conducted via computer with the assistance of UNHCR and sometimes the local Icelandic embassy.

Before 2010 a selection team from Iceland went to the country of asylum to work on the selection delegation and met with all the families that UNHCR referred. After those interviews a decision was made regarding the ones who were offered asylum.

6.3 Case Documentation

The identities of refugees are investigated by the Directorate of Immigration and if there are any problems with documents they are identified. The refugees receive cultural orientation from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) before travelling to Iceland, this includes information about rights and duties, the resettlement programme, Icelandic society and culture, climate and geography. The cultural orientation also covers information regarding challenges the refugees will inevitably meet.

6.4 Decision Making Process

Before a decision is reached, all the cases are interviewed by the refugee committee via video conference. It is stressed that all family members participate in the interview, even the youngest ones. The main objective of the interview is to assess the individual's or the family's present situation and how they feel about moving to Iceland. The committee usually does not ask about the past or the information already documented by UNHCR; the focus is on the present and future. A decision is finally taken based upon the overall evaluation of the need for asylum as well as on prospects for successful integration.

The Refugee committee informs the Minister of Social affairs and Housing of its recommendation. The Ministry of Welfare notifies UNHCR headquarters and the UNHCR field office of its decision by sending a list with the names of every individual that is offered the right to settle in Iceland as soon as possible after return of the delegation to Iceland. Travel arrangements are prepared by IOM according to a contract.

6.5 Processing Time

Every effort is made to process the entry visas as fast as possible so that the period between the decision of the Icelandic authorities and the arrival of the refugees in Iceland is as short as possible. Average time is three months.

7. Emergency Cases/Urgent Cases

No accelerated procedures for the processing of emergency cases are yet in place.

8. Special Categories/Special Needs

Since the year 2005 Iceland has focused on Women at Risk in its resettlement programme. In 2016 Iceland has been focusing on Syrian refugees. Iceland has also accepted medical cases and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) refugees.

9. Medical Requirements

No specific medical check ups are required before departure under the Icelandic programme. Upon arrival in Iceland the quota refugees receive a health examination and necessary medical care. The quota refugees are offered psychological assistance.

10. Orientation (pre-departure)

Refugees who are offered resettlement in Iceland are offered a two and a half day Cultural orientation session about resettling in a new country, living in Iceland and its culture, as well as information concerning their rights and duties in Iceland. They also receive information packages containing general information.

11. Travel

Travel is arranged by IOM in close co-operation with UNHCR. Cost of travel is paid by the Icelandic Government.

12. Status on Arrival and the Path to Citizenship

Refugees accepted for resettlement in Iceland are granted refugee status according to the 1951 Convention and Icelandic Act on Foreigners nr. 96/2002. The refugees are subsequently granted residence and work permits. As soon as the quota refugees have arrived in Iceland they receive refugee status. The process takes less than four weeks. The Directorate of Immigration, municipality and the Red Cross in Iceland assist the refugees filling in the necessary forms. Refugees receive travel documents from the Icelandic state. The refugee will receive a permit to stay in Iceland for four years and can then apply for a permanent residence permit.

To receive a permanent residence permit refugees must attend 240 hours of lessons in Icelandic for foreigners, which is paid for by the Government of Iceland. A refugee who meets the conditions of the refugee definition according to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees must have been domiciled in Iceland as a refugee for five years to be able to apply for citizenship and have attended 250 Icelandic lessons. The cost of citizenship application for adults is 15.000 ISK. Furthermore there is an Icelandic test that the applicant will have to pass. The Directorate of Immigration may grant Icelandic citizenship to a child born in Iceland that has demonstrably not acquired other citizenship at birth and has not yet acquired Icelandic citizenship or the right to acquire it when the application is made. The child shall have been domiciled and been a resident in Iceland for at least three years from birth.

13. Domestic Settlement and Community Services

13.1 Actors

The reception and integration of refugees is co-ordinated by the **Ministry of Welfare** in co-operation with the **Icelandic Red Cross** and the **municipality** where the refugees will be resettled. A Steering Group with a member from the ministry, the local Red Cross, and the municipality is established in each resettlement programme and is responsible at the local level. There is also a consulting committee where the ministry, the Red Cross and the local authorities each have one representative. The resettlement programme is for one year where comprehensive support from the local authorities is provided including social services, special support for children at the elementary and kindergarten level and children with special needs are offered necessary services. There is a close cooperation between the social services, the school system and the local health care centres.

Support families are an essential feature of the Icelandic integration programme for resettled refugees. The support families scheme is based on the initiative of individual citizens who

volunteer with the Icelandic Red Cross to assist a refugee to integrate into their respective local communities. Support families undergo specific training before being formally assigned to a refugee, including a psychological aid course and a full briefing on the refugee's cultural background.

13.2 Reception

Newly resettled refugees are met at the airport by representatives of the Ministry of Welfare, as well as the local authorities and Icelandic Red Cross which join them in the last part of their journey from the airport to their new homes.

13.3 Social service

The Social Service office in each of the municipalities receiving resettled refugees provides them with a case worker that amongst other things, assist the person in taking an active part in the labour market or to seek further education.

13.4 Housing

Upon arrival, refugees are provided with furnished apartment, with all necessary appliances and clothing. The Red Cross is responsible for furnishing the apartments. Basic food for the first few days is also provided.

13.5 Health

Upon arrival in Iceland, all refugees undergo a medical check-up. Medical and dental care is provided as required, free of charge, during the first six months of residence in Iceland. After six months, refugees have the same access to the health system as Icelandic citizens. Psychological assistance is provided for a longer time free of charge.

13.6 Language Training, Employment-Related Training

Language training is provided during the first year of residence. The municipality provides cultural orientation as well as employment training or support applying for further education.

Refugees are expected to attend Icelandic language classes. In case of smaller groups the refugees will go to open classes, but for larger groups there have been private classes for the groups.

13.7 Education

Iceland has a ten-year compulsory education for children from the age of 6 to 16 years. Younger children under, from approximately 18-24 months of age, attend kindergarten.

13.8 Financial Assistance

The refugees will receive financial assistance to cover their living expenses according to a standard fixed by the Social Services of the municipality that they are residents in. The refugees will also receive other benefits such as child allowance, special rent benefits and financial assistance for leisure activities for children, transport, and school meals.

14. Family Reunification of Refugees

The Government of Iceland acknowledges that family unity is an important factor that facilitates the integration of refugees in their country of resettlement. Cases of family reunification are dealt with under the provisions of the Act on Foreigners, on a case-by-case basis. Reunification of families is not counted within the resettlement quota and there is no special programme for submission of cases for family reunification.

According to the Act on Foreigners, refugees have a right to reunite with their close family members as defined in the Act on Foreigners, (i.e. the spouse, cohabiting partner or registered partner, and the children of the person concerned who are under the age of 18), if the family ties already existed when refugee status was provided.

Family members of a person who has been granted refugee status in Iceland can apply for family reunification directly to The Directorate of Immigration in Iceland. In cases when children apply for family reunification in Iceland, as their parents have received refugee status and for some reason the children have not been included in the application, it is necessary to provide documents which support that the parent has full custody of the child or shared custody and the other parent permits that the child migrates in Iceland. In the cases when there is a family reunification of resettled refugee in Iceland the government pays 75 per cent of the travel cost.

No distinction is made between resettled refugees and persons who have been granted asylum.

15. References/Resources

Survey and statistics on resettlement program, Ministry of Welfare:

<http://eng.velferddarraduneyti.is/information/refugees>

Icelandic Nationality Act:

<http://eng.innanrikisraduneyti.is/laws-and-regulations/english/citizenship/nr/6297>

Act on Foreigners:

<http://www.althingi.is/lagas/139a/2002096.html>

Criteria rules of the Refugee Council in Iceland:

<http://www.velferddarraduneyti.is/malaflokkar/flottafolk/mottaka/nr/4548>