

**COUNTRY
CHAPTER**

ICE

ICELAND

BY THE GOVERNMENT OF ICELAND



Iceland Overview

Resettlement programme since: 1996	Selection Missions: Yes	Dossier Submissions: Exceptionally
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Resettlement Admission Targets for 2011:

Admission targets for UNHCR submissions:	Is being revised
Total Resettlement Admission Target:	Is being revised

Regional Allocations for 2011:

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

Sub-quota features:

Designated sub-quota/acceptance for:	2011 Description, additional comments:
Emergency resettlement procedures	
Medical cases	
Women-at-risk cases	In 2010 Iceland received 2 cases from Colombia
Unaccompanied children	
Family Reunion (within programme)	

1. Resettlement Policy

Iceland has received groups of refugees for resettlement since 1956. Between 1956 and 2007 a total of 481 refugees were resettled in the country. The **Icelandic Refugee Committee** (until 2005 the Council) was established in 1996 and since then Iceland has overseen the reception of refugees annually or every other year, approximately 22 refugees each 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 30 individuals. The resettlement policy is now being revised.

The Icelandic Refugee Committee is the consultative body on quota refugees. The **Welfare Ministry** (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 the 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 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Statute of Refugees and regional instruments, who 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 a stateless person.

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 recognised under UNHCR's mandate who fall into one of the following categories:

Legal or physical protection needs, when the refugee meets *one* of these conditions:

- immediate or long-term threat of forced repatriation or expulsion;
- threat of arbitrary arrest, detention or imprisonment;
- threat to human rights or physical integrity/safety, analogous to those considerations under the refugee definition and rendering asylum untenable;
- refugees who are victims of violence and/or torture;
- refugees who are victims of violence and/or torture who require special medical attention. Their resettlement in Iceland is subject to the availability of appropriate medical services.

Women at Risk:

- Women facing serious physical and/or psychological threats (rape, sexual harassment, violence, exploitation, torture, etc.)
- Lacking the traditional protection of their families or communities.

Refugees without any prospects of local integration in the first country of asylum:

Under specific circumstances, refugees who do not have an opportunity to establish themselves in their country of refuge in a manner appropriate to their cultural, social, religious or educational background. When refugees remain for a certain period in a country of asylum without being able to integrate and do not have the prospect of repatriation in the near future, they can be considered for resettlement.

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 the selection process was via dossier selection. The selection of candidates was made through refugee status determination on the basis of the Resettlement Registration Forms 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 Refugee Committee in close consultation with UNHCR. The Icelandic Red Cross plays an important role in the communication between the Icelandic authorities and the UNHCR.

6.2 Preparations

Before leaving for the selection in the country of asylum the selection delegation and Icelandic Refugee Committee receive the Resettlement Registration Forms regarding individuals and families recommended by the respective UNHCR field office. The number of cases studied and interviewed is higher than the number of cases that will finally be offered asylum in Iceland. Each individual case is studied thoroughly.

6.3 Case Documentation

The identities of refugees are also investigated in advance by the Directorate of Immigration and problems with documents identified. Upon arrival in the country of asylum the selection committee starts with a cultural orientation session about Icelandic society and culture, climate and geography. The cultural orientation also covers information regarding challenges the refugees will inevitably meet. This introduction is offered to the whole group of refugees selected by the local UNHCR.

6.4 Decision Making Process

Before a decision is reached all the cases are interviewed by the selection delegation as well as observed during the cultural orientation session. 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 delegation usually does neither 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 of successful integration.

Upon arrival in Iceland, the selection mission informs the Minister of Welfare and the Refugee Committee 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, usually within 10 days. Travel arrangements are prepared by the 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.

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.

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 receive information packages containing general information about living in Iceland as well as information concerning their rights and duties in Iceland.

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 will be subsequently granted residence and work permits. They will be eligible to apply for citizenship after 5 years of continuous residence in Iceland.

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 the applicant must have attended a course in Icelandic for foreigners, which in the case of refugees is paid for by the Government of Iceland. The same applies to an applicant who has held the same type of permit to stay in Iceland for the four years preceding his/her application. There are no circumstances which may cause the applicant to be deported. The applicant can not have any outstanding cases in the criminal justice system wherein he/she is a suspect or has been charged with a punishable act in order to be issued a permanent residence permit.

A refugee who meets the conditions of the definition of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 must have been domiciled in Iceland as a refugee for five years to be able to apply for citizenship. The same shall apply to persons who have been granted residence permits in Iceland on humanitarian grounds. The cost of citizenship application for adults is 15.000 ISK.

The Minister of Interior 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 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

a comprehensive support from the local authorities is provided including social service, special support for the children in the elementary- and kindergarten and children with special needs are offered necessary service. There is a planned cooperation between the social services, the school system and the local health care centers.

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

13.3 Housing

Upon arrival, refugees are provided with a furnished apartment, a television, radio, vacuum cleaner, refrigerator, computer, washing machine and clothing. The Red Cross is responsible for furnishing the apartments. Basic food for the first few days is also provided.

13.4 Health

Upon arrival in Iceland, all refugees will have 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.

13.5 Language Training, Employment-Related Training

Language training is provided during the first year of residence. A project manager from 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.

13.6 Education and Employment

Iceland has a ten-year compulsory education for children from the age of 6-16 years. Children under the age of 6 years old will attend kindergarten.

In each of the communities receiving resettled refugees, a project manager is appointed by the local authorities to mentor and monitor the integration of the refugees concerned. The project manager is responsible for liaising with potential employers and arranging job interviews for the refugee.

13.7 Financial Assistance

The refugees will receive allowances to cover their living expenses according to a standard fixed by the Social Services of the local community. The refugees will also receive other benefits such as child allowance, special rent benefits and financial assistance for leisure activities for the 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, the children of the person concerned who are under the age of 18.

Family members of a person who has been granted refugee status in Iceland can apply for a 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.

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

15. References/Resources

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.velferdarraduneyti.is/malaflokkar/flottafolk/mottaka/nr/4548>