

LANDLORD CONVERSATION GUIDE

Welcoming Refugees

How to Talk About Refugees

The **Landlord Conversation Guide: Welcoming Refugees** is a comprehensive resource designed to facilitate dialogue between housing providers (both small landlords and rental apartment building managers) and individuals seeking housing opportunities for refugees. This guide is a tool for agency case managers, sponsors, advocates, and organizations seeking to foster understanding and collaboration between housing providers and prospective tenants from diverse backgrounds. By providing comprehensive information, practical tips, and talking points, this resource empowers users to navigate discussions with empathy, confidence, and a focus on mutual benefit. This resource gives users information and tools to facilitate productive conversations, promote inclusivity, and address refugee housing needs.

1. Introduction: Establish Common Ground

- **Greet Them Warmly:** Begin the conversation with a friendly greeting, addressing them by name if possible.
- **Express Appreciation:** Thank them for taking the time to speak with you.
- **Establish Common Ground:** Acknowledge that you know and respect all housing providers' goal of ensuring that properties are well-maintained and occupied by responsible tenants.

2. Provide Context: Understanding Refugee Status

- **Define "Refugee Status":** Refugee status signifies that an individual has fled their home country due to a well-founded fear of persecution, or due to conflict, violence, or other threats to their safety and well-being. Refugees are granted temporary protection in a host country, such as the U.S., based on humanitarian grounds.
 - *A **refugee** is someone who has been forced to flee their home country due to persecution, war, or violence. They seek safety and protection in another country, often facing significant challenges and uncertainties.*
- **Diverse Backgrounds:** Emphasize the diversity among refugees, highlighting that they come from many countries and various backgrounds, each with their own unique experiences.
- **Reasons for Displacement:** Discuss the several reasons why individuals may seek, and be granted, refuge in the U.S., such as conflict, political oppression, natural disaster, or economic hardship.
- **Vetting:** Explain the rigorous vetting process that refugees undergo before being resettled in the U.S. Note that there are multiple security screenings, background checks, interviews,

and medical examinations done by the Department of State and its non-government and U.S. government partners to ensure the safety and security of both refugees and host communities in the U.S.

- **Legal Status:** Clarify the legal status of refugees and their rights in the U.S., including their right to live in the U.S. under the protection of international refugee laws and agreements as well as their eligibility to work and to access healthcare and public-school education for children < 18.

3. Provide Understanding

- **Resettlement:** Once cleared for resettlement in the U.S., refugees are supported to move to cities throughout the States, where they receive support from local resettlement agencies to facilitate their integration into their new communities.
- **Initial Registration:** Refugees are initially registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or a relevant government agency in the host country.
- **Refugee Status Determination:** UNHCR or other recognized entity assesses the refugee's claim for protection, determining their eligibility for refugee status.
- **Resettlement Application:** If deemed eligible, refugees may apply for resettlement to a third country, such as the U.S., through a referral process facilitated by UNHCR or another agency.
- **Security Clearance:** Applicants for refugee status in the U.S. undergo security screenings done by various U.S. government agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), to identify any security threats.
- **Medical Examination:** Refugees are also required to have medical examinations to ensure they meet health requirements for entry into the U.S.
- **Cultural Orientation:** Before departure to the U.S., refugees participate in cultural orientation programs to familiarize themselves with American culture, customs, and basic norms.
- **Financial Support:** Once in the U.S., refugees qualify for financial support from resettlement agencies and from the U.S. Government.
 - *Government Assistance:* Explain that refugees receive financial assistance from the Department of State upon arrival to help meet basic needs, including housing.
 - *Short-term Financial Assistance:* Mention that this support can provide a reliable source of income to cover rent payments to increase self-sufficiency and reduce the risk of default.
 - *Timely Payments:* Emphasize that housing providers can count on timely and consistent rent payments to meet their income goals.

4. Provide Reassurance: Addressing Concerns and Questions

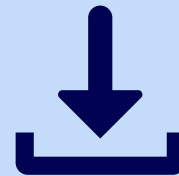
- **Encourage Questions:** Invite housing providers to ask any questions or express any concerns they may have about renting to refugees.

- **Provide Factual Information:** Offer information to address any misconceptions or concerns they may have about the legal status or background of refugees.
- **Discuss Support Systems:** Explain that refugees receive support from resettlement agencies, the government, family, and friends they may have who are already in the U.S., and other community groups to help address basic needs, including rent payments for housing.
- **Emphasize Legal Compliance:** Assure housing providers that renting to refugees is allowed by U.S. fair housing laws and does not pose any legal risk to them as housing providers.

RESOURCE

A fact sheet was published by the U.S. Departments of State, Health and Human Services (HHS), Homeland Security (DHS), and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to answer questions that landlords and property managers may have as they consider renting to refugees and other eligible newcomers.

DOWNLOAD



5. Address Common Concerns

Refugee Housing Solutions conducted a survey in April 2024 among housing providers, and it showed common concerns when it comes to renting to refugees. Below, each concern is addressed, including its rationale, a talking point, and a suggested action item.

- **Communication Limits and Understanding of Rental Property Care**
 - **CONCERN:** Housing providers may face challenges due to language barriers and limited ability to communicate with tenants, which may impact refugee tenants' understanding of home care and maintenance.
 - **TALKING POINT:** Assure housing providers of language assistance availability and of cultural orientation programs and educational materials that help refugee tenants understand U.S. home care and maintenance expectations.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Coordinate with language service providers or bilingual staff to offer interpretation services for meetings, lease signings, and ongoing communications with refugee tenants.
- **Concerns and Misunderstanding About Immigration Practice and Policy**
 - **CONCERN:** Housing providers may express concerns about the current immigration system and unvetted newcomers, preferring enhanced border control and immigration reform before considering housing refugees, facing hurdles in accessing credit or criminal history for non-citizen tenants.
 - **TALKING POINT:** "While we understand concerns about immigration policies and the U.S. Southwest border situation, our focus is on addressing the immediate housing needs of vulnerable individuals and families already in our community. Action Item: Engage

in community outreach and advocacy efforts to raise awareness about refugee housing needs and advocate for policies that support refugee resettlement and integration, while respecting fair housing principles.”

- **Cultural and Social Integration**

- **CONCERN:** Housing providers may express concerns about refugees’ cultural adaptation and adherence to local customs and laws, fearing that cultural differences may cause issues among tenants and neighbors.
- **TALKING POINT:** “Cultural integration is complex, and we are committed to facilitating positive interactions and mutual understanding between newcomer tenants and housing providers. We offer cultural orientation programs and resources to support newcomer tenants in adapting to their new community. We also have information and resources for housing providers.”
- **ACTION ITEM:** Organize cultural orientation workshops or events to promote understanding and respect between housing providers and their tenants from diverse backgrounds, fostering a sense of community and inclusion. Give tenants the RHS [Tenant Toolkit](#) and other resources for first-time renters, and give housing providers the RHS [Landlord Toolkit](#).

- **Rental Income Risk and Tenant Stability**

- **CONCERN:** Housing providers may be worried about tenants leaving abruptly and/or causing property damage, and about legal status uncertainties for those without Social Security numbers or U.S. government IDs.
- **TALKING POINT:** “We understand the importance of stability for both landlords and tenants. Our support systems include help with renting safe, secure housing – which sometimes includes emergency or supplemental rental assistance – and in finding employment, which helps with reducing risk of early/sudden departures, or lease-breaking.”
- **ACTION ITEM:** If possible, provide housing stabilization services, such as rent assistance, lease co-signing, and/or landlord incentives, to mitigate the risk of tenant turnover and lost rental income, ensuring a mutually beneficial relationship.

- **Tenant Vetting and Support Services**

- **CONCERNS:** Housing providers may worry about the challenges in vetting refugees, given their limited U.S. tenancy or work history, and prefer agencies and sponsors to handle integration and support services.
- **TALKING POINT:** “We prioritize ongoing support for refugee tenants to ensure successful tenancies. Our collaboration with community partners allows us to provide comprehensive support services, including financial assistance, career readiness training and job search support.”
- **ACTION ITEM:** Strengthen partnerships among resettlement agencies and other

local organizations to offer holistic support services to refugee tenants, addressing their housing, employment, and integration needs.

- **Safety and Legal Considerations**
 - **CONCERN:** Housing providers may be concerned about their inability to access criminal background checks, income verification, and to contact past employers and landlords are a key concern for landlords.
 - **TALKING POINT:** Explain U.S. government screening processes and provided cultural orientation, offering references and tenant education programs to address income verification concerns.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Share a handout that explains who different newcomers are, why they are here, and the screenings they go through when entering the U.S., including criminal background checks.

6. Partnership with Resettlement Offices

- **Collaborative Benefits:** Discuss the benefits of collaborating with resettlement agencies that help refugees find housing.
- **Intermediaries:** Highlight that these agencies often act as intermediaries, facilitating communication between housing providers and refugees.
- **Minimized Downtime:** Mention that working with resettlement agencies can help ensure that vacancies are filled promptly, thus maximizing rental income.

7. Cultural Competency and Support

- **Addressing Concerns:** Address any concerns landlords may have about cultural differences and/or language barriers.
- **Orientation and Support:** Explain that resettlement agencies provide cultural orientation and support services to help refugees integrate into their new communities.
- **Ongoing Support:** Assure landlords that they can rely on ongoing support from these agencies to address any issues or concerns that may arise during a refugee tenancy.

8. Positive Community Impact

- **Social and Economic Benefits:** Discuss the broader social and economic benefits of renting to refugees, such as fostering diversity and inclusivity within communities and bringing in new workers to cities and towns that need them.
- **Success Stories:** Highlight success stories of refugees who have become valuable members of society, contributing to local economies and enriching neighborhoods.
- **Encouragement:** Encourage landlords to consider the positive impact they can make by providing housing opportunities to those in need.

9. Closing: Emphasizing Collaboration and Partnership

- **Express Gratitude:** Thank them for considering renting to refugees and for their openness to the conversation.
- **Express Willingness to Collaborate:** Express your willingness to collaborate further, whether by providing additional information, facilitating introductions to resettlement agencies, or addressing any further questions or concerns they may have.
- **Leave the Door Open:** Reiterate that you are available to continue the conversation and provide ongoing support as needed.

10. Follow-Up

- **Follow-Up Email:** Send a follow-up email summarizing the key points discussed, expressing gratitude once again, and reiterating your availability for further discussion or assistance.
- **Provide Resources:** Include links to resources or organizations that can provide additional information or support, such as local resettlement agencies or government websites.
- **Stay Engaged with Active Housing Providers:** Keep the lines of communication open and follow up periodically to check in on their progress or address any new concerns that may arise from active refugee housing providers.

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