

HOUSING PROVIDER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Renting to Newcomers and Refugees

This FAQ guide is designed to help landlords and other housing providers understand the unique aspects of renting to newcomers, including refugees and asylum seekers. It addresses common questions and concerns, providing practical information to facilitate a smooth and inclusive experience for all.

- **Who are newcomers?**

- The term “newcomers” generally refers to people who have recently arrived in the U.S. to resettle from another country. This term encompasses various groups, including but not limited to:
 - **Refugees:** Individuals who have fled their home country due to religious or ethnic persecution, civil unrest and conflict, or other violence and have been granted asylum in the U.S.
 - **Asylum Seekers:** People who are in the U.S. or at its borders and have requested asylum risks and harm in their home country but have not yet received a decision on their asylum claim.
 - **Humanitarian Parolees:** Individuals who are granted temporary entry into the U.S. for urgent humanitarian reasons, such as medical treatment or other emergencies, but do not have a formal immigration status. This currently includes Ukrainians, Afghans, Haitians, Venezuelans, Nicaraguans, and Cubans.
 - **Temporary Protected Status (TPS) Holders:** Immigrants from countries experiencing ongoing armed conflict or environmental disasters who are allowed to stay in the U.S. temporarily.

🔗 **Resource:** [Understanding resettlement pathways and different support systems by population](#)

- **What kind of support do newcomers receive?**

- Newcomers receive various forms of support including financial aid, housing assistance, and public health and social service benefits. The specific support varies by their newcomer status. For example, refugees typically get cash assistance, temporary housing, and access to federal benefits; whereas asylum seekers may receive emergency cash assistance and temporary housing, but have limited access to public health and social service benefits. See below for additional resources:

🔗 [Landlord Toolkit](#)

🔗 [Understanding resettlement pathways and different support systems by population](#)

🔗 [Fact Sheet on Renting to Refugees and Other Eligible Newcomers](#)

🔗 [Federal Housing Program Eligibility for Newcomers](#)

This resource shows which newcomer groups are eligible for different federal housing programs.

- **How reliable are newcomers as tenants?**

- Newcomers are often highly motivated to maintain stable housing, having waited years — or even generations — for resettlement. Grateful for the opportunity to build a new life in a safe environment, they are committed to being responsible tenants. For some, renting in the U.S. may be their first experience living in Western-style housing, and they tend to take their tenancy obligations seriously.
- Soon after arrival to the U.S., most newcomers receive both formal housing orientation and hands-on guidance when they move into a rental property. Almost all have ongoing support from a resettlement agency case worker or team.
- Many newcomers receive rental assistance and other financial support from resettlement agencies or local nonprofits to help them meet their initial and some ongoing financial obligations. The U.S. government also provides resettlement services to refugees and other eligible newcomers. This [fact sheet and FAQ](#) from the federal government addresses common questions housing providers may have about renting to newcomers.

 **Watch:** [A landlord shares their positive experience renting to newcomers](#)

- **Do newcomers have rental history or credit scores?**

- Newcomers will likely not have a U.S. rental history or credit score, but resettlement agencies can provide references and vouch for their reliability. Further, newcomers' identification documents are officially cited by the federal government as acceptable substitutes to use in vetting tenant applications: [U.S. Federal Government Fact Sheet & FAQ on Renting to Refugees and Other Eligible Newcomers](#)
- Landlords and property managers may skip credit checks for refugees and other eligible newcomers, provided it complies with the Fair Housing Act. Any exception to credit checks must be applied equally to all individuals within the same newcomer status regardless of their race, color, national origin, religion, sex, family status, or any disability. NOTE: It is advisable for landlords to review their credit check and background check policies to avoid unlawful discrimination and to get ideas to consider alternative verification methods to assess a tenant's ability to pay rent.

- **What identification do newcomers have once they resettle?**

- Newcomers with different immigration statuses will have different identification. Examples are these:
 - **Travel Letter:** Provided to refugees without passports for international travel to the U.S. This serves as photo ID until they receive their Social Security number (SSN) and card, an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and/or a driver's license.
 - **EAD and SSN:** Refugees and Special Immigrant Visa holders are eligible to work without an EAD; other newcomers need an EAD to begin working. SSNs are applied for within a week of a newcomer's arrival if they are eligible to work and typically arrive within two weeks.
 - **I-94:** An immigration document with an A-number (case number) that remains with a newcomer until they become a citizen; it has no photo.

- **Passports/National ID:** Some newcomers arrive with a passport or national ID from their home country, and this can be used as photo ID.
- **Travel Assurance:** Most newcomers receive this document before arrival in the U.S. to serve as a temporary ID for securing housing until other identification is available.

 **Resource:**

- More information about different forms of documentation newcomers may have when applying for housing:
 - [Rental Application Essentials: How Newcomers Can Use Alternative Documents](#)

• **What can I do to make my rental process newcomer-friendly?**

- **Online and Paper Applications:** Provide both options, as some newcomers may be unfamiliar with technology or face challenges with automated systems due to different documentation.
- **Multilingual Application Processes:** Translating applications into common newcomer languages like Spanish, Swahili, Arabic, Dari, Pashto, Ukrainian, and Russian can help ease the process for non-fluent English speakers.
- **Flexible Lease Terms:** Short-term leases with options to extend can be beneficial as newcomers settle in and stabilize their income
- **Flexible Payment Options:** Offering in-person payment options is helpful as new arrivals may not have had time to open a bank account. Also, offering incremental rent payment options – like bi-weekly payment – can be helpful too, especially if a household has wage earners who are paid at different times.
- **Reasonable early termination fees:** This concession can be extremely valuable so newcomers can avoid extra financial outlays while still settling in.

 **Resource:** [How to make rental operations newcomer-friendly](#)

• **What happens if a newcomer breaks their lease?**

- Much like any other tenant, if a newcomer breaks their lease, they must face agreed financial penalties like paying the remaining rent or an early termination fee. A landlord may take legal action as allowed by the lease. However, a landlord may be better served to negotiate an early lease termination without penalties to avoid the hassle of legal action. This consideration will be particularly helpful for tenants who have an opportunity to reunite with family members in another building or town.

• **How can I communicate effectively with newcomer tenants?**

- Resettlement agencies and other community organizations often provide language support and can help facilitate communication between newcomers and landlords. Additionally, visual aids and translated rental applications and lease agreements can be helpful to communicate more easily.

- **What cultural considerations should I be aware of?**
 - **Communication Styles:** Many cultures have different approaches to communication, and many prefer indirect ones, so patience and clarity are key.
 - **Household Size:** In some cultures, extended families live together and/or have many children, and these families will be applying to rent. When accommodating larger households, it is important to ensure that you as an individual landlord or your company's occupancy standards comply with local policies and regulations.
 - **Cultural Adjustment:** Newcomers may be unfamiliar with Western housing norms, so providing clear instructions on maintenance, waste disposal, safety measures, and other household responsibilities can help.
 - **Gender Roles:** Gender-based dynamics vary across cultures. In some cases, women will not feel comfortable interacting directly with male landlords or maintenance staff, so offering alternative communication channels is important.
- **What should I do if there are maintenance issues or concerns?**
 - Treat maintenance issues as you would with any tenant, ensuring timely and effective communication. Resettlement agencies always brief the newcomers they support on the importance of timely communication about maintenance requests, including information on what is urgent and what is routine. The resettlement agency, another nonprofit, and/or neighbors with better English language skills can assist if there are language barriers or other challenges.
- **What are some common terms used in resettlement?**
 - **R&P (Reception and Placement):** Refugees who are vetted overseas before being granted asylum come to the U.S. through the State Department's R&P program with an initial 90 days of support provided upon their arrival. It includes support for temporary housing, orientation to the new community, and assistance with immediate needs such as setting up a bank account, applying for a Social Security number, accessing healthcare, registering children for school, and understanding local services. This support is typically provided by resettlement agencies.
 - **Welcome Corps:** The Welcome Corps is a program that allows private citizens and community organizations to sponsor refugees and help them settle in the U.S. It provides a way for individuals and groups to directly support refugee resettlement by offering financial and social assistance, helping them integrate into their new communities.
 - **Virtual R&P (Virtual Reception and Placement):** Virtual R&P is a model that delivers services remotely rather than in-person. This approach includes virtual orientations, online assistance, and remote case management to support refugees, especially during circumstances where in-person services are challenging or impossible.
 - **U.S. Ties:** These are individuals like family members or friends, or community groups who are in the U.S. These ties assist in the resettlement process by providing social support, help finding and paying for housing, and offering other integration assistance like job search support, enrolling children in schools, etc.

- **Cash-Based R&P:** Cash-Based R&P is a variant of Reception & Placement where refugees receive a cash allowance to cover their initial living expenses, rather than receiving in-kind services and goods. This approach provides refugees with the ability and flexibility to manage their own resettlement to the U.S.
- **Cultural Orientation:** Cultural orientation is offered before newcomers in the R&P program arrive to the U.S. and continues when they arrive. For other newcomers, CO happens only after arrival. In all situations, CO involves information-sharing and training, and education to help newcomers start to understand and adapt to U.S. social norms, multi-cultural environments, laws, etc.
- **Ethnic and Community-Based Organizations (EBCO):** EBCOs are nonprofit or community organizations that specifically support their own ethnic or cultural groups. They offer services with familiarity about the distinct needs of their communities, including programs that support integration and adaptation to new environments.

www.refugeehousing.org

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