



Volunteer Handbook

IRCO's mission is to promote the integration of refugees, immigrants, and the community at large into a self-sufficient, healthy, and inclusive multiethnic society.

IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

Who is a refugee?

The 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention describes a refugee as someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group; a refugee either cannot return home or is afraid to do so. About 16 million people are considered 'refugees'. An additional 45 million are internationally displaced, but are not yet designated as refugees.

Who is an asylee?

Asylees are individuals who, on their own, travel to the United States and apply for/receive a grant of asylum. These individuals do not enter the United States as refugees. They may enter as students, tourists, businessmen, or even in undocumented status. Once in the U.S., or at a land border or port of entry, they apply to the Department of Homeland Security for asylum, a status that will acknowledge that they meet the definition of a refugee and that will allow them to remain in the United States. Asylum *applicants* are not eligible for Office of Refugee Resettlement funded assistance and services; only those granted asylum.

What is the difference between a refugee and an economic migrant?

An economic migrant normally leaves a country voluntarily to seek a better life. If he or she returns home, they would continue to receive the protection of his or her government.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS

1. Displaced peoples are interviewed by United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)
2. If UNHCR deems them appropriate for settlement, their names are recommended for resettlement in various different countries (including the United States).
3. Applicants for resettlement are interviewed by Department of Homeland Security.
4. Individual works with Office of Refugee Resettlement to decide upon resettlement location, taking into account: preferences, sponsorship, existing communities and state resources.
5. The majority of refugees in Oregon are initially settled in the Portland Metro area.
6. Voluntary Organizations called "Volag" are contracted to do the initial resettlement. The Volag perform such essential tasks as picking-up the refugees at the airport, finding them a place to live and helping to furnish their home with basic necessities. Cash services are administered by the Volags for the first eight months in the U.S. under a contract from Oregon's DHS. The local VOLAGS are Catholic Charities, Lutheran Community Services Northwest, Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees (SOAR)
7. Under other contracts, English language, vocational training and job placement services are provided through the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) to refugees for their first 12 months of residence in the U.S.

OREGON REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT NUMBERS

Countries of Origin	2011	2010	2009
Burmese	261	211	109
Iraqis	109	198	140
Somalia	119	184	96
Bhutanese	137	131	134
Former Soviet	77	107	138
Cubans	116	99	76
Congolese	25	69	0
Iranians	19	42	10
Eritreans	25	15	13
Haiti	0	11	0
Ethiopians	13	6	11
Vietnam	0	5	14
Tibetan	3	4	0
Afghans	23	0	18
Rwandan	1	0	0
Other	16	41	51
Totals	944	1123	820

IRCO HISTORY TIMELINE

- 1976 **Indochinese Cultural and Service Center (ICSC) started**
Community-based organization, formed by Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese refugees, with mission to help refugees adapt to U.S. culture/life, while acquiring skills needed to become employed
- 1980 **Southeast Asian Refugee Federation (SEARF) started**
Organization formed by other group of Southeast Asian refugees, formed primarily to address economic development and interpretation needs of community
- 1980 **United States Refugee Act**
Federal law that laid out systematic guidelines for admission of and provision with admittance of refugees to the United States
- 1984 SEARF and ICSC merge and become the **International Refugee Center of Oregon (IRCO)**
- 1994 **Asian Family Center** is created
- 2001 IRCO purchases and moves into 10301 NE Glisan Street
Renamed to be the **Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization**
- 2002 IRCO Celebrates **25th** Anniversary!
- 2006 **Africa House** is created
- 2011 IRCO's Asian Family Center purchases new building and establishes it as home

IRCO TODAY

- +/- 135 full-time, year-round & 350 part-time, casual and temporary employees. Staff represents 30+ ethnicities and speaks 50+ languages
- 90+ distinct social service programs
- In 2011 IRCO served over 31,000 unduplicated clients
- 250-300 active volunteers a month. They contribute over 2,000 hours per month.
- 4 Large locations and 10+ smaller locations.

VOLUNTEERING TIME COMMITMENT

To ensure high quality and consistency of service offered to IRCO clients, each program dictates their own time commitment requirement from volunteers. Therefore, while three months is generally the agency-wide minimum commitment, certain programs may require longer time commitments from volunteers. Before committing to volunteering in a specific program, please be clear about the length in time expectations.

IRCO VOLUNTEER POLICIES

Volunteers, whether working on site at an IRCO facility or elsewhere, should adhere to the general IRCO expectations. They should:

- Refrain from discussing potentially divisive and culturally-specific topics such as religion, politics, or gender roles with IRCO clients
- Adhere to IRCO and relevant confidentiality policies.
- Demonstrate respect to IRCO's clients by adhering to the following Dress Code: No stains, rips, or holes in pants. Jeans are acceptable, but sweatpants are not. No low cut blouses, short skirts or tank tops.
- Treat all clients, visitors, employees, and fellow volunteers in a courteous and respectful manner.
- Follow the policies of the program for which they are volunteering.
- Volunteers working with IRCO in any capacity are not permitted to exchange gifts IRCO clients at any time, including any gifting of money or gifting of materials.
- Volunteers may not transport IRCO clients in their vehicles and volunteers may not ride in the vehicles of IRCO clients.

Volunteer Management

After this information session you will be referred to at least one volunteer supervisor in each program you express an interest in learning more about. The volunteer supervisor will:

- Program-specific trainings for volunteers
- Guidance of the work of the volunteers
- Planning and organizing volunteer appreciation events
- On-going consultation and assistance for volunteer
- Tracking the hours of volunteers on a monthly basis

If you ever have a concern, question, or a volunteering related problem you may always contact the IRCO's volunteer coordinator at volunteer@irco.org or 503-234-1541