

# HIAS Welcome Circles: FAQ



Welcome the stranger.  
Protect the refugee.

Version 2, February 16, 2023

This FAQ document is not comprehensive and remains a work in progress. It is intended to provide some responses to key questions that those who are considering forming a **HIAS Welcome Circle** through the new **Welcome Corps** program may have. Check [hias.org/welcome-circles](https://hias.org/welcome-circles) regularly for updates, and for information about the general Welcome Corps model, visit [welcomecorps.org](https://welcomecorps.org).

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## Big Picture FAQs:

### What is the Welcome Corps? And what is a HIAS Welcome Circle?

The Welcome Corps is a new private sponsorship program created by the U.S. government to empower everyday Americans to play a role in welcoming refugees arriving through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and supporting their resettlement and integration as they build new lives in the United States.

The HIAS Welcome Circle program was launched in 2021 as part of an emergency response to the fall of Kabul, building a network of volunteers across the country who helped to welcome and resettle Afghan evacuees in the United States. HIAS adapted the model for Ukrainians. With the State Department's launch of the Welcome Corps program, HIAS Welcome Circles can now welcome refugees from around the world as part of the United States Refugee Admissions Program.

### What is the difference between the Welcome Corps and traditional refugee resettlement?

The key difference between Welcome Corps and traditional resettlement is the entity responsible for initial resettlement services to refugee newcomers. Since the formal inception of the USRAP in 1980, the Department of State has partnered primarily with non-profit resettlement agencies to provide initial resettlement assistance to newly arriving refugees. The Welcome Corps creates new opportunities for everyday Americans to engage directly in refugee resettlement through private sponsorship, independent of and complementary to existing avenues for volunteering with resettlement agencies.

Refugee newcomers being served through the Welcome Corps are choosing to receive initial resettlement services for their first 90 days (180 days in HIAS' model) from a certified Welcome Circle instead of a resettlement agency. There is no formal case management provided through the Welcome Corps model. Aside from this, refugee newcomers served through the Welcome Corps program remain eligible for all other federal, state, and local benefits and services to which they are entitled. They are also eligible for certain refugee benefits that are offered by resettlement agencies, such as [Preferred Communities](#) and [Matching Grants](#), although the capacity of those agencies to take on clients may be limited, and as a result, access will not always be possible.

### What is the difference between the Welcome Corps and the Sponsor Circles program? What is the difference between refugee status and humanitarian parole?

The Sponsor Circle program is an emergency response program that was initially launched to support groups of everyday Americans who wanted to welcome Afghan humanitarian parolees into their communities after the evacuations from Kabul. The program was then expanded to welcome

Ukrainian humanitarian parolees through Uniting for Ukraine. Subsequent special parole programs for Venezuelans, and later Cubans, Haitians, and Nicaraguans were then added, as well.

While the Sponsor Circles program for Afghans has concluded with the end of Operation Allies Welcome, these other humanitarian parole programs are still ongoing.

Humanitarian parole is a complementary pathway to refugee resettlement, rather than an interwoven facet of refugee resettlement. It does not provide newcomers with a durable, long-term status in the United States. There is no pathway for newcomers to adjust their status to a green card or citizenship unless they are sponsored for a family or work visa or are granted asylum in the United States. Humanitarian Parolees are only able to apply for public or refugee benefits through an act of Congress, and therefore not all nationalities can access these basic supports. HIAS continues to work with Welcome Circles for Ukrainians as part of our emergency response effort (for more information on welcoming Ukrainians through U4U, click [here](#)).

In contrast, the Welcome Corps program is part of the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). This means newcomers go through the same interviews, medical checks, and security checks as all other refugees resettled in the United States, and have the same pathways to permanent residency and citizenship.

### **If traditional refugee resettlement works, why is Welcome Corps happening? Is it responsible? Is it stepping on toes?**

The Welcome Corps program is the initiative that is intended to augment the United States' capacity to welcome and resettle refugees from different parts of the world. It is being launched in parallel to the existing and ongoing efforts of the U.S. refugee resettlement program and is intended to complement PRM's Reception and Placement Program (R&P) by creating new, additional opportunities for individuals and organizations nationwide to be directly engaged in supporting refugee resettlement. By tapping into the goodwill of American communities, the Welcome Corps will expand the United States' capacity to provide a warm welcome to higher numbers of refugees. The launch of the Welcome Corps fulfills the U.S. Government's commitment to develop a private sponsorship program for resettling refugees in the United States. The establishment of the Welcome Corps is also an aspect of the U.S. Government's ongoing efforts to strengthen, modernize, and expand the USRAP. Eventually over time, the PSR pilot program could contribute to increased refugee admissions to meet the targets set through the annual [Presidential Determination](#).

### **Who can participate in the Welcome Corps program to sponsor refugees?**

A consortium of non-profit organizations with expertise in welcoming, resettling, and integrating refugees into U.S. communities will participate in the design, implementation, and launching of the program. Community organizations and institutions will also participate in the Welcome Corps as Private Sponsor Organizations (PSOs) and Private Sponsor Groups (PSGs).

### **What is a Private Sponsor Organization (PSO)?**

Private Sponsor Organizations are established and/or incorporated organizations that are able to mobilize, organize, oversee, and/or offer support to Private Sponsor Groups. HIAS will participate as a Private Sponsor Organization (PSO) to support Welcome Circles under its umbrella.

### **Who are Private Sponsor Groups (PSGs)?**

Private Sponsor Groups are defined as: Groups of individual American citizens or permanent residents who apply to sponsor the resettlement of a refugee or a refugee family to the United States. Groups must reside in the local community where the privately sponsored refugee is expected to resettle and are required to accept primary responsibility for providing financial, resettlement, and emotional support to the refugee or refugee family they are sponsoring.

### **What are the minimum requirements to become a Private Sponsor Group (PSG)?**

- Groups of at least 5 individuals
- Complete background checks
- Complete training
- Complete Welcome Plan
- Sign Commitment Form
- Raise a minimum of \$2,275 per newcomer
- Commit to at least 90 days of support

HIAS' experience with private sponsorship tells us that the financial and time commitments are often greater than this minimum requirement. If you decide to form a PSG with HIAS' help, you will have access to resources that can help you calculate the realistic costs.

### **When will the Welcome Corps program be rolled out?**

The U.S. Department of State will roll out the Welcome Corps in two phases. In the *first phase* of the program, private sponsors participating in the Welcome Corps will be matched with refugees whose cases are already approved for resettlement under the USRAP. The application portal for this phase is open now, and the Department of State will begin facilitating matches between private sponsors and refugees arriving within the first six months of 2023.

In the *second phase* of the program, which will launch in mid-to-late-2023, private sponsors will be able to identify refugees to refer to the USRAP for resettlement and support the refugees they have identified. The roll out of the program will be sequenced so that the identification component is introduced after the launch of the matching component. Further details on the second phase of the program will be forthcoming.

### **Will privately sponsored refugees be eligible for the services provided through the traditional reception and placement program?**

Private sponsors will be expected to provide core initial resettlement assistance and services to refugees that are similar to what is provided to refugees through the R&P program such as the identification of housing and initial rent support, provision of basic necessities, initial orientation to the community, assistance with English language learning, support in securing employment, and assistance with enrollment in social, medical, and other mainstream public benefits/services for which refugees may be eligible. Privately sponsored refugees will remain eligible for additional assistance and services provided by the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), similar to refugees supported through the R&P program.

### **Will refugees resettled through private sponsorship be subject to all USRAP processing requirements?**

Privately sponsored refugees supported through the PSR pilot program will be subject to all the same processing requirements as other USRAP refugee applicants, including security vetting and handling by Resettlement Support Centers and the Refugee Processing Center.

### **Who will identify the refugees to be resettled during phase 1 of the program?**

PRM will identify and work to facilitate matches between identified refugee cases already in the USRAP pipeline and approved Private Sponsor Groups or Organizations.

### **Who will identify the refugees to be resettled during phase 2 of the program?**

Private Sponsor Groups/Organizations will identify the refugees they wish to refer to USRAP. PRM is in the process of developing the details of this application process and will release further details.

## Refugee Eligibility FAQs:

### Who can be sponsored? What is the eligibility criteria?

In order to be eligible for the Welcome Corps private sponsorship program, refugees must satisfy the following criteria:

Further details regarding eligibility will be released as the Welcome Corps pilot program launches.

### Does the refugee applicant need to be registered with the UNHCR or the state of the country of asylum?

Further details regarding eligibility will be released as the Welcome Corps pilot program launches.

### I am an asylum seeker in the U.S. Can I be sponsored under the Welcome Corps program?

Further details will be released as the Welcome Corps pilot program launches.

### I am currently living in my country of origin, but the conditions are very bad and I don't feel safe anymore. Can I be sponsored as a refugee under the Welcome Corps program?

Further details will be released as the Welcome Corps pilot program launches.

## HIAS Welcome Circle FAQs:

### Who is eligible to form a Welcome Circle, and what are the requirements?

The Welcome Corps has established the following eligibility criteria for welcome circles:

- Groups of at least five individuals over the age of 18 who reside in the same local community will be eligible to form a welcome circle. All group members must complete a required background check. Circles forming under HIAS' umbrella are strongly recommended to launch with a minimum of five people and a maximum of eight people serving as the core group. Additionally, the minimum commitment required by Welcome Corps is three months; however, HIAS very strongly recommends a commitment of at least six months.
- Welcome Circles must demonstrate that they have fundraised a minimum of \$2,275 in cash and in-kind contributions per refugee newcomer that they will support. (That \$2,275 mirrors the maximum amount of funding provided through the Reception and Placement program.) These funds are to be spent on behalf of refugees to provide for their initial housing and other basic needs. *Note: in HIAS' experience this number often falls short of the realistic cost. If you don't know yet what family size you are able to support or what those realistic costs will be, don't worry – HIAS has tools to help you with this calculation.*



- Welcome Circles must pass knowledge assessments to demonstrate completion of a required online course that provides information on expected roles/responsibilities of welcome circles, how to prepare/organize for supporting refugee newcomers, key considerations for sponsorship (e.g., expectations, power, culture, religion, trauma, and privacy), and how to navigate challenges.
- Welcome Circles are required to submit a “Welcome Plan” through which they pledge and detail how they plan to provide core initial resettlement services to refugee newcomers for at least the first 90 days after newcomers arrive in a local community. The Welcome Plan also requires welcome circles to consider how they will facilitate cultural connections (e.g., connections to the refugee diaspora and places of worship). *Note: While the national program requires that core resettlement services be administered in this initial 90-day period, HIAS recommends committing to remaining active in supporting newcomers for a period of at least six-months.*

All HIAS Welcome Circles will use the Welcome Corps website to submit applications. HIAS, as a Private Sponsor Organization (PSO) will mobilize and support Welcome Circles to welcome refugees. CSH and their partners will oversee the vetting and certification of Welcome Circles through an application process and monitor the Welcome Corps program to ensure privately sponsored refugees are getting the support they need for success and collecting data to evaluate the program. HIAS will provide guidance and support to all Welcome Circles that have formed under our umbrella for the six months of commitment that we recommend.

### **Do I need to be Jewish to form a Welcome Circle with HIAS? Can I form as an interfaith group? Or a different faith affiliation?**

HIAS works with both refugees and volunteers from all faiths! You do not need to be affiliated or connected with one specific faith, or with any faith group at all. HIAS has worked with Welcome Circles that are linked to synagogues, churches, mosques, other faith groups, interfaith groups, and collections of unaffiliated individuals.

### **I am part of an educational institution. Can I form a Welcome Circle?**

The Welcome Corps initiative is available for educational institutions to form Welcome Circles. In Phase 2, this can include identifying refugee students and their families overseas to sponsor, so that they can arrive to the United States with a durable refugee status.

### **I am an individual not currently affiliated with a group, and I am not sure if I can form a Welcome Circle on my own. What does HIAS recommend?**

HIAS can provide outreach tools and resources to help you recruit a group. You can reach out to neighborhood forums, community centers, faith groups, educational institutions, and more – we encourage you to think creatively! There is no wrong way to form a Welcome Circle.

As of right now, HIAS is not actively connecting individuals with fully formed Welcome Circle groups.

### **Why form a Welcome Circle?**

- You urgently want to be reunited with a friend or family member
- You want to respond to a humanitarian need
- You want to connect with those in your community
- It is aligned with your values
- You or your family was welcomed to the United States as immigrants
- You want to support refugee integration

### **What are the responsibilities of Welcome Circles?**

Welcome Circles are expected to provide core initial resettlement assistance and services to refugees that are similar to what is provided to refugees through the R&P Program such as:

- Pick newcomers up from the airport
- Secure housing
- Provide basic necessities
- Provide time-bound income support
- Assist in completing essential documentation
- Support in accessing medical services
- Support in accessing available benefits
- Enroll children in school
- Provide English language support
- Provide job search advice and support
- Assist with transportation
- Provide community orientation
- Facilitate cultural connections
- Transition the newcomers to self-sufficiency at the end of the sponsorship period
- Complete 30-, 90-day, and 180-day reports and other experience surveys

### **What is the financial commitment of a circle?**

There are two answers to this question.

- First, the requirement: all circles are required to raise a minimum of \$2,275 per refugee newcomer they welcome. This is the same amount that is allocated for individuals and the resettlement agencies that resettle them through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). However, in order to be resettled through a circle, refugees sponsored through the Welcome Corps program must opt out of the USRAP — so the minimum financial commitment of a circle is to raise the amount they would have received had they remained in the program.
- Second, the recommendation: cost of living — rent, food, transportation, technology, phone service, etc. — varies greatly across cities and states. Depending on your location, it is highly likely that you'll need additional funds available to put toward those and other expenses. We recommend that as you consider whether you are able to form a Welcome Circle, you conduct a budget exercise based on six months of support to determine the funding you will seek to raise to support this endeavor. Don't worry if you don't know how many individuals you will be welcoming yet; set up a budget based on the finances you have available and the housing possibilities you have been looking at, and this will be used to determine the size of the family with whom you will be matched. At the time of application, you must show that you have raised 60% of the minimum funding required, and the rest can be collected later on (as long as you have identified where the funds will come from).

### **Do Welcome Circles have to provide any money upfront when sponsoring a refugee?**

Welcome Circles do not need to pay money to HIAS, to the Welcome Corps platform, or to the U.S. government during the application period. Welcome Circles will be required to show proof of funds raised, with at least 60% of the total funds needed in-hand at the time of applying.

### **How long will private sponsors be expected to support the refugees they resettle?**

The U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) anticipates that Private Sponsor Groups and Organizations will be expected to provide core initial resettlement assistance and services to refugees for at least 90 days after resettlement. PRM will release further details on the scope of required responsibilities for Private Sponsor Groups and Organizations later this year.

HIAS recommends that after completing core initial resettlement tasks within that 90-day period, Circles remain actively engaged with the refugees for an additional three months to ensure refugees feel comfortable in their self-sufficiency and to provide for a more gradual transition out of sponsorship.

### **Can Welcome Circles participate in multiple sponsorships?**

Further details will be released as the Welcome Corps program launches.

### **Can I as an individual participate in multiple Welcome Circles?**

Further details will be released as the Welcome Corps program launches.

### **Can Welcome Circles include members of the same family or household?**

Further details will be released as the Welcome Corps program launches.

### **Do all group members have to provide financial support? How much should we each contribute?**

The financial requirements apply to the group as a whole rather than to each individual member of the Private Sponsor Group.

When submitting your application, you will be asked to upload proof that the group has raised at least 60% of the total \$2275 required for each refugee. This evidence of sufficient funds raised could be a screenshot of a bank account balance, GoFundMe page, or other documentation that clearly demonstrates sufficient funds. You will not be asked to include bank account numbers or any other private or personal information.

### **After six months, what happens to any funds remaining in the circle's account? Should we transfer it over to the family?**

HIAS asks that all circles launched as part of our “umbrella” commit to this effort for six months; more often than not, 90 days/3 months is too short a time period to ensure that the path to self-sufficiency is firmly in place. For this six-month period, circles should create a budget based on the money raised and work with the individual or family you’re assisting to create a plan for when the circle’s financial support is no longer available; as such, it is likely that there won’t be much of a surplus at the end of this period. If there are remaining funds, there are two options depending on your group’s fundraising strategy. If funds were earmarked for one specific refugee individual or family, then remaining funds should be transferred to the newcomers and an additional financial planning conversation should take place. If funds were raised for a project that is larger in scope (for example, a faith or cultural community raising money for a “refugee resettlement” fund that intends to support multiple families) then it may be possible to roll funds over to support additional newcomers.

NOTE: It is hoped that adults in the family will be employed by month four; additionally, they will receive cash assistance (public benefits). The amount of money that the refugees you are assisting will need from the circles should decrease as they gain income from new employment and access benefits.

### **Is any federal funding provided to each refugee resettled through a circle?**

There is no federal funding for refugees who opt into the Welcome Corps program. However, refugees resettled through Private Sponsor Groups do have access to public benefits such as Medicaid, SNAP, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and TANF, and are eligible for some of the benefits that resettled refugees can access, including [Refugee Cash Assistance](#), [Refugee Medical Assistance](#), [Preferred Communities](#), and [Matching Grants](#).

### **Who pays for refugees' flights to the United States?**

Refugees resettled to the United States have flights arranged by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a UN agency. However, these flight costs are loans that refugees are required to pay back. This is not intended to cause damage to the refugees' finances, but is seen instead as a way to start building credit in the U.S. and learn the basics of financial literacy. Loan repayment is handled by Resettlement Agencies, and therefore loan counsellors work with the refugees to ensure they are supported through the entirety of the process. Like all refugees, those sponsored through the Welcome Corps will be responsible for repaying their travel loans. Circles may assist refugees with their loan repayment if they choose to do so.

### **My group is located near a HIAS Resettlement Partner or another local refugee resettlement agency. Should we still pursue starting a HIAS Welcome Circle?**

If you live near a HIAS resettlement partner (we call them "affiliates"), we recommend that you work directly with them! If you need to be connected with a HIAS resettlement partner, please contact Andrae Gagne at [andrea.gagne@hias.org](mailto:andrea.gagne@hias.org) and Ermias Yoseph at [ermias.yoseph@hias.org](mailto:ermias.yoseph@hias.org). If you're already working with a local resettlement agency, you should continue working with them.

### **In previous years, my community group has helped resettle refugees with local agencies. How are HIAS Welcome Circles different from refugee sponsorship programs we may have done in the past?**

Since 1980, when the USRAP was formed and put into place, nearly all community assistance in resettlement has been carried out in partnership with a local resettlement agency. Local agencies provide case management for refugee clients and work with community groups to assist with resettlement. Welcome Circles do not work with a local resettlement agency, and there is no case management in place for clients. The circle model is based on the Canadian private sponsorship model, and national umbrella agencies — in this case, HIAS — provide guidance and support to circles, but not case management.

### **Is it advisable to launch a circle if we live in a community with a high cost of living and/or a low immigrant population, or a more rural area?**

There are many factors to consider when assessing how suited a community is for successful resettlement. We have seen success in unexpected places; for example, HIAS clients have been successfully resettled in high-cost places like Westchester County, NY and more rural parts of Connecticut with low immigrant populations. Refugees who are considering participating in the Welcome Circle model will be counseled about potential locations to ensure that they are able to make informed decisions about where they are heading. Additionally, HIAS hopes to encourage as many Welcome Circles as possible to form in shared communities, so that our new neighbors hopefully feel less alone.

### **How big should a circle be? What is the magic number?**

Welcome Circles must have a minimum of five people over the age of 18, but HIAS strongly encourages a core circle of five to eight participants; that inner circle should be the group that has high touch with the individual or family you are assisting. Of that group, one will be the designated Welcome Circle lead who will communicate directly with a HIAS Welcome Circle staff member throughout the commitment. There can be concentric circles of volunteers around this core group made up of those volunteers who have less direct contact with the new neighbors; these volunteers can provide support through researching employment opportunities or schools, identifying healthcare providers who accept Medicaid, preparing new homes, gathering clothing for families, etc.

### **What direct support does HIAS provide Welcome Circles?**

Each HIAS Welcome Circle will have a HIAS staff contact to serve as a guide throughout this process. Welcome Circle Liaisons will work with circles to build their Welcome Plans, prepare for arrivals, navigate post-arrival activities and challenges, and connect circles to technical and operational resources on best practices in resettlement. HIAS will also offer monthly office hours with technical experts to share guidance and resources on topics ranging from trauma-informed care and boundary setting to employment and housing.

## **Welcome Plan FAQs:**

### **How can we find appropriate housing?**

Housing needs, resources, and challenges will vary from one community to the next. Some areas have high costs, others are affordable but without access to public transportation, and others may have limited options altogether due to housing shortages. You may want to consider housing in two stages: short- and long-term.

- **Short-term housing** could be booked through Airbnb, or it might be an “in-law” suite or apartment owned by someone in your congregation. If you have a room or rooms in your home with a separate entrance, kitchen, and bathroom, then this could be a good temporary arrangement. Airbnb also offers housing credits for certified circles for a period of up to 30 days.

If the temporary housing setup is a room inside your home with all of these spaces shared, it might be difficult or stressful for the family. This is particularly true for families where their religious customs dictate not being able to uncover their hair in front of a man they are not related to. But it also can be difficult because they have spent the past few years in difficult or stressful living conditions, either in an urban setting or a refugee camp with little space for quiet time alone with their family. Having their own space allows families to process some of the difficult or traumatic experiences they’ve endured.

- **Long-term housing** will most likely be a rented house or apartment. After the support period ends, the family will be responsible for paying their own rent. For this reason, housing should be affordable, and/or in an area with housing subsidies available from the municipality or state government.

If you plan to have the family living on the same property as a member of your congregation, note that this should be treated as a landlord-renter arrangement with a signed lease and monthly rent payments. Consider how easily the family will be able to access transportation from the location. If it is not near public transportation, you’ll want to plan on helping them obtain a U.S. driver's license and access to a used car to purchase.

In areas where affordable housing with access to transportation is difficult to come by, consider building relationships with members of the local real estate community who can help you navigate the challenges.

**What is the level of detail that is needed to fill out the Welcome Plan? How specific does the housing plan need to be, for example, not knowing the timing of when the family would arrive/how many people?**

You should be as detailed as you can, and most importantly, clear about your capacity in each area of the Welcome Plan. For example, if you think you can meet the initial needs of a multigenerational family of five, including a person in a wheelchair or with other health needs, you should specify that in your application. If you are only able to take individual adults, you can state that too. Be as detailed as you are able. If you have already identified housing and spoken with the landlord; collected

commitments for in-kind donations of furnishings and household goods; had conversations with local agencies, charities, cultural community groups, interpreters, etc., note that in the plan. You may even want to specify in the plan who you've spoken to at a particular agency, and what guidance and/or support they've agreed to offer.

### **I'm having trouble budgeting without knowing how large a family to expect. What does HIAS recommend?**

Start by determining how much money you expect your community can raise, and then build out a budget of monthly expenses, and that will help to determine what size family you would be able to accommodate. HIAS can help you with this, as well. You can use tools like [this](#) to help consider what expenses to include in your budget by selecting a city in your area from the menu at the top to see the average costs in your local area. You can also reference guides for the Canadian model, like [this one](#), which can help determine what costs to plan for and what can be reduced using volunteers and in-kind donations (donations of physical goods and items). HIAS has also developed a budget template that you can use to factor in additional variables, such as food and cash assistance: [click here](#) to download the Excel file to your local computer.

## **Application Process FAQs:**

### **OK, I think we're in! How do we get started?**

That's terrific. Go to <https://welcomecorps.org/get-started/> and start your application now! If you submit an application, please email [andrea.gagne@hias.org](mailto:andrea.gagne@hias.org) and [ermias.yoseph@hias.org](mailto:ermias.yoseph@hias.org) to let us know.

### **Is there any cost for the background check?**

Yes, the background check has a \$15 fee. All core members of a circle are required to submit (and pass!) this standard background check administered by Sterling Volunteers via the [Welcome Corps website](#).

### **I just submitted a request to complete the background check for myself. Can I start moving forward with the application form process while I'm waiting to hear that the check has been authorized?**

Yes! We encourage you to start the application process as soon as possible, so you can continue to prepare while background checks are being processed. These steps are outlined [here](#).

### **Can the actual application be submitted without a finalized/complete background check?**

Applications will not be considered complete until all required pieces are submitted.



### **How long does the process from submitting an application to being matched with a family/individual take?**

In Phase 1, once certified, circles will be flagged in the system as eligible to be matched. Most likely, it will be one to two months from the time a circle is certified to the arrival of the new neighbor/s.

Further details on the timeline for arrivals in Phase 2 are forthcoming from the U.S. government. Most likely, arrivals will take longer as individuals will need to go through the same interviews, security checks, and medical clearances as all other refugees resettled to the U.S.

### **Unfortunately, no one in our networks (or our circle) speaks the refugee's language. What if we are matched with a family that has minimal or no English language skills?**

It is definitely possible that the individual or family you welcome will not have fluency in English. We encourage you to explore local interpreters/translators in your area. Other free resources include Tarjimly ([tarjim.ly](http://tarjim.ly)), a free app using volunteers from around the world, and Talking Points ([talkingpts.org](http://talkingpts.org)) for free machine translation texting. There are professional interpreters available through for-profits like Language Line ([languageline.com](http://languageline.com)). As part of your Welcome Plan, you will be asked to consider if there are wider refugee diaspora groups or resources in the area. If there is a local community that you are in touch with, explore if they are willing to serve as a volunteer or, ideally, paid interpreter. Note that by working with HIAS under our PSO “umbrella” Welcome Circles can gain access to certain language supports, including a discounted account through Language Line as well as free Rosetta Stone licenses.

### **Before we decide, can we speak with a Welcome Circle that has done this before? Can we see a sample Welcome Plan as an example?**

If you are forming a Welcome Circle with HIAS, we have a range of resources to support you – including one-on-one advice from a HIAS staff member, connections with past Welcome Circles who have done this project before, sample Welcome Plans from real Welcome Circles (with personal details redacted), and more. Please reach out to us at [andrea.gagne@hias.org](mailto:andrea.gagne@hias.org) and [ermias.yoseph@hias.org](mailto:ermias.yoseph@hias.org).

### **We want to make sure our group is respectful of the boundaries and emotional distress that the family may have. What is your recommendation?**

Keep in mind that the role of a Welcome Circle is to be a resource for capable, intelligent adults to get their feet on the ground in a new and unfamiliar community while they work towards self-sufficiency. The first step is always listening to the family about their wants and needs and respecting their decisions.

We also recommend not asking questions that bring up trauma. If the family you have sponsored offers information about their experiences, listen and be supportive; however, we should never ask people to share these experiences as it might be uncomfortable or cause them distress. Build trust. Dignity needs to be respected. You will find more information on trauma-informed support, boundaries, and expectations in the online training required through the Welcome Corps application, as well as through special HIAS-developed workshops.

It is also important that circles' members take care of themselves and practice self-care. Being exposed to someone else's trauma can take a toll on us as well.

**The application requires me to enter information about the Private Sponsor Organization my circle will be associated with — is that HIAS? What should I enter there?**

Step one is to ensure that a HIAS staff person knows that you'll be completing an application — we will be delighted to hear this news! Please email [andrea.gagne@hias.org](mailto:andrea.gagne@hias.org) and [ermias.yoseph@hias.org](mailto:ermias.yoseph@hias.org) to ensure that we are officially notified.

**How do we handle and disburse the money that we raise? Should it be held in a different account and disbursed from there? Should we set up a separate non-profit or a GoFundMe?**

Circles will need to research their options and make choices that make sense for their groups. It may be possible, and make sense, to work with a local non-profit as a fiscal sponsor; you could also consider keeping the money raised in a separate fund in a account. If a circle is able to use a 501c3 account, then people can give tax-deductible donations, which is an advantage when encouraging people to support the work.

Circles will be asked to designate a member to oversee finances. This person is responsible for overseeing the expenditure of the resettlement funds and introducing refugee adults to family budgeting, credit, the banking system, and taxes.

Because the goal is for families to achieve self-sufficiency as quickly as possible, consider transitioning the budgeting for household expenses like utilities and grocery bills to the family early on. Funds for the household budget, along with additional pocket money, should be disbursed to the family on a regular basis (whether that is weekly or every other week will be part of your planning). You should plan to make rent payments directly to the landlord for the duration of the six months support period. Try not to make large transfers to the family at once, as this will appear as income and could jeopardize access to certain welfare benefits.

**What happens if the family or individual our circle has assisted is not on their feet after six months?  
What is our obligation to continue to provide financial support?**

Refugees, as a group, have historically been expected to become economically self-sufficient in 3-5 months. Otherwise, the U.S. refugee program and the professional agencies that do this work would not be successful either. It is key to promote economic self-sufficiency from the very beginning, being clear that the financial support from the circle is time-limited. Success for them — and for refugees coming to the U.S. in general — requires early economic self-sufficiency, defined as having the income to support basic needs. They will be eligible for welfare cash assistance, but in most locales, that is not enough to pay rent, much less anything else.

The key source of income is employment. Depending on where the families live, this may mean one full-time worker can support the family, but in some cases, two workers will be needed. It is often the case that even high-skilled individuals with fluent English have to take jobs below their station until they learn more about the U.S. world of work and are in the position to “compete” for advanced-level jobs. Job search, interviewing, and workplace expectations are likely very different from what they know.

There may be employment services available in your area, but circles play a role in helping adults secure employment. Circles members and their networks should be tapped, and the family should use any connections they have. There may be refugee providers in your area that can help with this. There will be mainstream providers as well. Typically, anyone on welfare is assigned to an employment program. Circles will have access to HIAS’ robust trainings and guidance as well as from national providers, Switchboard ([switchboardta.org](http://switchboardta.org)) and Upwardly Global ([upwardlyglobal.org](http://upwardlyglobal.org)) for higher-skilled professionals.

Providing financial literacy early on, with a major focus on budgeting, is the best way to engage and educate the family, giving them the information, and perhaps eye-opening reality, of their situation at this early stage of resettlement. It’s helpful for them to create short-term and longer-term goals so they know they are not stuck where they are. Perhaps there are connections to high-paying jobs for Afghan professionals, but in most cases, finding those jobs takes more time than what they have due to their financial reality. They can be simultaneously working a “survival” job and pursuing their longer-term goals. It may be helpful to think back to when you or your ancestors came to the U.S., how they may have struggled, and where they are today.

Other considerations: There could be emergency cash assistance to help families over a short-term hump. If there is someone over age 65 or someone with a permanent disability, they will be eligible for disability support. If the rent is simply too high for the family, then relocation may be necessary. There also could be subsidized housing options in your area.

### **What other support services are available after the six months are up?**

The refugees you assist may be able to access support through refugee and/or mainstream programs that offer employment-related assistance and/or case management. They may automatically be connected to these services upon opening welfare cash. Your State Refugee Coordinator will have information on these services; they likely have a web page. The families will also have access to any services for low-income households and/or regular mainstream services. Aside from employment, this could include special education, disability, senior services, mental health/behavioral supports, and other human services. The families will likely continue to receive food stamps and Medicaid while they remain low-income. As stated earlier, they may be on cash assistance, but it is not enough to live on.

NOTE: Depending on where you live, the service providers may be less familiar with serving limited English speakers and/or non-Western populations. Advocacy and education on their behalf may be required. There are civil rights laws that require federally funded service providers to provide interpretation. More guidance on this will be provided.

### **Can you share an example of what success looks like in this model, after six months?**

Early success looks like this: the family is in permanent housing and has the understanding and means to cover basic expenses through employment. They are likely still receiving food stamps and Medicaid. The children are attending school, and adults are attending English as a Second Language classes (if needed). They have daily living skills (e.g., transportation, shopping, home maintenance, important U.S. cultural practices) and know where to turn if they need help, especially for medical and other urgent needs. They are aware of basic U.S. laws on child safety, the requirement to notify homeland security when they change address, the need to adjust their status, etc. Families are supported by their faith and/or ethnic community if they so choose. Continued support from circle members as friends would be a great benefit.