

# Resettlement: A life changing journey

Resettlement of Congolese Refugees  
from Rwanda to the United States



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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) work is humanitarian, social and non-political. The mandate of the Agency is to provide international protection to refugees and other persons of concern to the Office and, as a consequence, to seek permanent or durable solutions to their problem. These two functions, international protection and the identification of durable solutions, can be considered UNHCR's core objectives.<sup>1</sup>

Resettlement, under UNHCR auspices, is primarily meant to address the specific needs of refugees under the Office's mandate whose life, liberty, safety, health or other fundamental human rights are at risk in the country where they have sought refuge. The decision to resettle a refugee is normally taken, with priority, when there is no alternative way to guarantee the legal or physical security of the person concerned, for example:

- ▶ **Women & girls at risk,**
- ▶ **Survivors of violence and/or torture, and**
- ▶ **Unaccompanied or separated children.**



**Neimah Warsame**  
*Representative*  
*UNHCR Rwanda*

"UNHCR Rwanda is delighted with the adopted strategy on the upscale of resettlement activities. Without a doubt, the multi-year action plan has strengthened the role of resettlement through targeted interventions and initiatives, including a P2 group processing methodology focusing on refugees with specific needs.

Strategically, resettlement is seen as a burden-sharing mechanism and is a crucial component in the comprehensive durable solutions strategy. In the context of Rwanda, resettlement offers a key dividend in the management of continuously increased refugee population numbers, thereby reducing the impact on physical and protection space as well as overextended key services in the refugee camps.

I am confident that the Congolese refugees who will benefit from the opportunity for resettlement will integrate in their new communities fairly well given their strong and resilient nature."

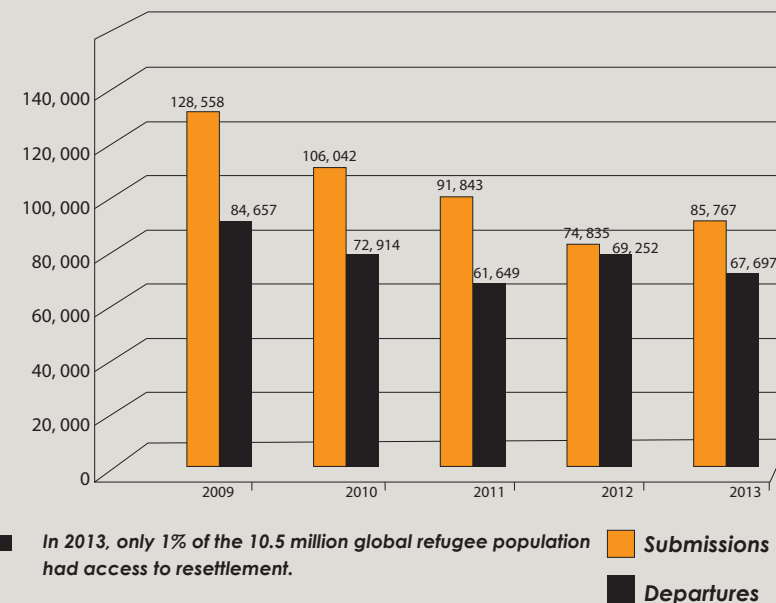
Under a comprehensive approach to a particular context, consideration of all three durable solutions (voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement) may identify resettlement as the optimal solution for the individual or refugee groups in question.

While the number of States with ongoing resettlement programmes has risen, the number of places available is still significantly outstripped by refugees in need of them.

Resettlement has played a key role in unlocking the impasses in protracted refugee situations and opening the possibility of other durable solutions. Despite this, and based on UNHCR analysis, resettlement is still relatively restricted.

Resettlement is a solution that only applies to refugees in very specific circumstances. Recognition of refugee status does not necessarily mean that a refugee has a case for resettlement, and there is no obligation on countries to accept refugees for resettlement.

## Global Resettlement Trends



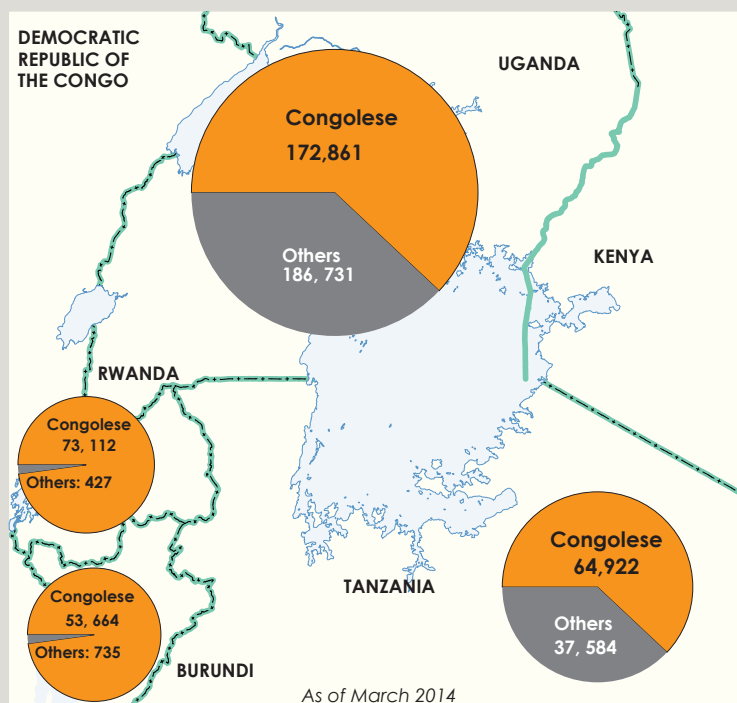
Based on resettlement trends, UNHCR has predicted 690,915 refugees globally will be in need of resettlement in 2014. However, it is expected that only 12% of those will actually be submitted for resettlement.

In conclusion, resettlement not only delivers the solutions for the individuals and families directly concerned, but can also enhance and reinforce the overall conditions for asylum, protection and solutions more generally speaking.

<sup>1</sup> The 1950 UNHCR Statute states that UNHCR "shall assume the function of providing international protection, under the auspices of the United Nations, to refugees who fall within the scope of the present Statute and of seeking permanent solutions for the problem of refugees by assisting Governments.... To facilitate the voluntary repatriation of such refugees, or their assimilation within new national communities."

# Regional Approach for the Congolese Refugees

## Congolese Refugees within the Great Lakes Region



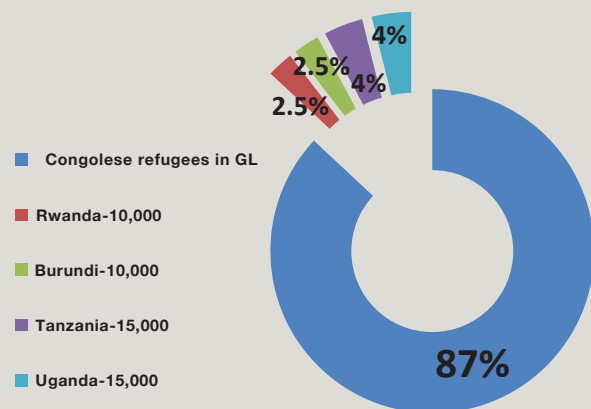
Among the countries in the Great Lakes region, various conflicts and uncertainties have plagued the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) for decades, making a safe return exceedingly difficult for most Congolese at the present moment. Out of the 469,964 Congolese refugees in Africa (as of March 2014), 364,559 (77%) are registered refugees in the Great Lakes region. Durable solutions remain largely elusive for Congolese refugees in this region.

In recognition of the fact that the majority of Congolese refugees remain in protracted situations, a meeting of the UNHCR Representatives in the Central Africa and the Great Lakes region (CAGL) was held in Dar-es salaam, Tanzania in March 2012, focusing substantially on comprehensive solutions as a theme. The meeting reviewed the use of resettlement for the Congolese refugees as a component of a broader comprehensive solutions strategy, and should be undertaken in tandem with enhancing opportunities for livelihood projects and self-reliance, local integration, as well as voluntary repatriation where appropriate. It also acknowledged the importance of a harmonized and coordinated approach among the key asylum countries in the region. Additionally, it was concluded that resettlement should be leveraged to enhance opportunities for local integration/self-reliance prospects.

As the situation in the Kivu remains uncertain, UNHCR issued an advisory on November 2012, urging States not to forcibly return persons originating from these areas until the security & human rights situation has improved considerably.

In this regard, a regional comprehensive durable solutions strategy was adopted including a multi-year plan targeting the resettlement of 50,000 Congolese refugees from the Great Lakes region (Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania and Uganda) to cover the period from 2012-2017. Rwanda and Burundi are each targeting at least 10,000 refugees, while Uganda and Tanzania are targeting 15,000 each.

## Congolese Resettlement targets (2012-2017)



To implement the resettlement strategy in these countries, the following criteria was established:

- ▶ Congolese refugees who arrived between January 1, 1994 - December 31, 2005, and
- ▶ Refugees originating from North & South Kivu, Katanga or Province Orientale.

The UNHCR will continue to monitor the situation in the DRC and the countries of asylum to explore feasibility of return or local integration/self-reliance prospects while engaging states and the international community. One such initiative is the Framework for Peace, spearheaded by the UN Special Envoy, Mary Robinson. In collaboration with the UN SESG, the African Union, the European Union and the United States of America have deployed their own Special Envoys to support the implementation of peace and security in the Great Lakes region. The framework is considering the structural causes fuelling instability in the DRC with the ideal goal being to achieve a long-term sustainable peace solution within the region.

# Strategic use of Resettlement in Rwanda

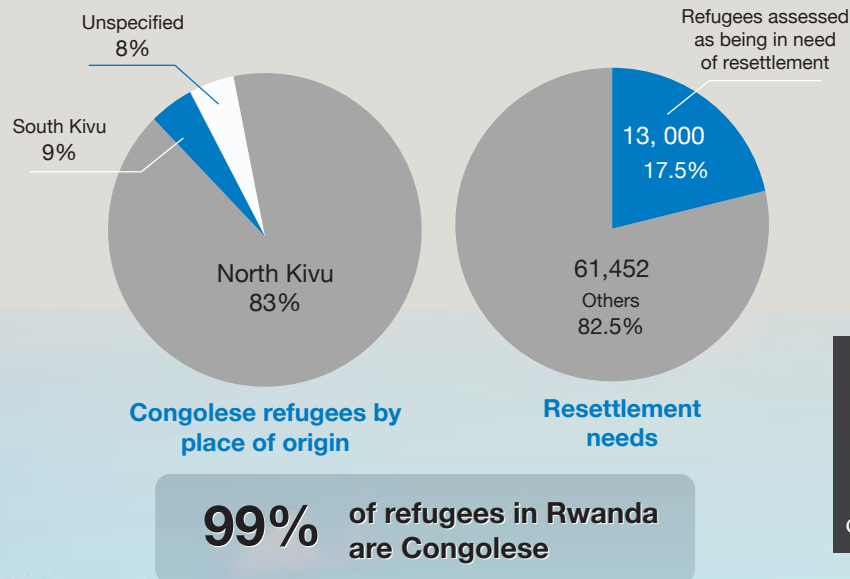
Prior to 2012, UNHCR Rwanda used resettlement to provide individual solutions for families using individually generated Resettlement Registration Forms (RRF) - also referred to as a Priority One (P1) referral by the USA, in a limited way. The process was time consuming and also involved the vetting of cases through committees and verification of resettlement needs at various stages. Using additional protection staff, a prescreening system was introduced to augment the number of cases available for processing. Despite the use of this processing modality, very few refugee families benefited from resettlement.

An elaborate and robust Re-registration and Verification Exercise was conducted from June 2011-May 2012 to update refugee data in order to accurately identify their needs and appropriate solutions. The verification data results highlighted that 23% of the refugee population had specific needs linked to the resettlement selection criterion. Additionally, 19% of the caseload fit the criteria for the regional comprehensive durable solutions strategy for the Congolese refugees. Furthermore, **over 93% of the refugees surveyed emphatically expressed an unwillingness to return to DRC**, citing concerns over insecurity and a fear of persecution based on their ethnicity. Lack of guarantees to recover their land and other property also influenced their decision.

As a result of this, UNHCR embarked on the strategic use of resettlement as a key element in the comprehensive durable solutions strategy, which was based on the actual resettlement needs. The 2013 UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs indicate that 13,000 Congolese refugees in Rwanda are in need of resettlement.

The updated verification data supported the global projection for Rwanda and set the stage for UNHCR to pursue resettlement more proactively both as a protection and a durable solutions tool, while incorporating a multi-year action plan. Additionally, the specific needs data more accurately identified the vulnerabilities of individual refugee families. Since the completion of the verification exercise and the implementation of the multi-year action plan, resettlement has been entrenched as a priority activity within the UNHCR Rwanda operation.

## Strategic use of Resettlement in Rwanda



In addition, integration and naturalization have proven both challenging and extremely limited. This is mainly a result of land constraints, population expansion, and the prospects of the return of thousands of Rwandans currently in exile.

## Refugee population in Rwanda

LOCATION	Urban Area	Gihembe Camp	Nyabiheke Camp	Kiziba Camp	Kigeme Camp	Mugombwa Camp	Unspecified*
	2,121	14,707	14,213	16,461	18,430	6,688	1,010
GRAND TOTAL							73,630

\* 1,010 individuals are yet to be processed/verified.



# Resettlement Group Processing

## Priority two (P2) Program in Rwanda

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Since 2012, a group identification methodology was adopted to address the time-consuming method of processing individual refugee cases for resettlement. UNHCR analyzed the specific characteristics of the refugee population in Rwanda and identified a potential group of vulnerable refugees within the Congolese population.

In mid-2012, a proposal from UNHCR Rwanda identifying the survivors of the Mudende Camp massacre<sup>2</sup> in Rwanda as a possible group in need of resettlement was cleared by the Africa Bureau and UNHCR Headquarters, and shared with the United States of America. The USA accepted the proposal from Rwanda and designated the survivors of the Mudende massacre as a Priority 2 (P2) group, to be processed from 2012-2015, consistent with the operation's multi-year action plan. To process refugee cases systematically, the USA, UNHCR Rwanda's main resettlement partner, employs a priority category system. P1 cases are individual referrals, which can include any persons from any country with compelling protection needs. P2 cases target specific groups identified by the US Department of State in consultation with UNHCR and other experts as being in need of resettlement.

Once the USA accepted the P2 proposal, it allowed for expedited processing, due in part to the data interface between UNHCR Rwanda and the US Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) databases. By simply pressing a button at the Byumba Field Office in Northern Rwanda, the already prepared P2 refugee cases are submitted directly to the USA.

**Since 2012 to date, UNHCR Rwanda has been operating the only P2 processing program in Africa.** By the end of 2013 the operation had surpassed its annual target by submitting over 2,400 individuals for resettlement to the USA, 76% (2,073) were P2 submissions. As of May 2014, 54% of the overall projected multi-year target (10,000) had been submitted primarily through the P2 group processing modality.

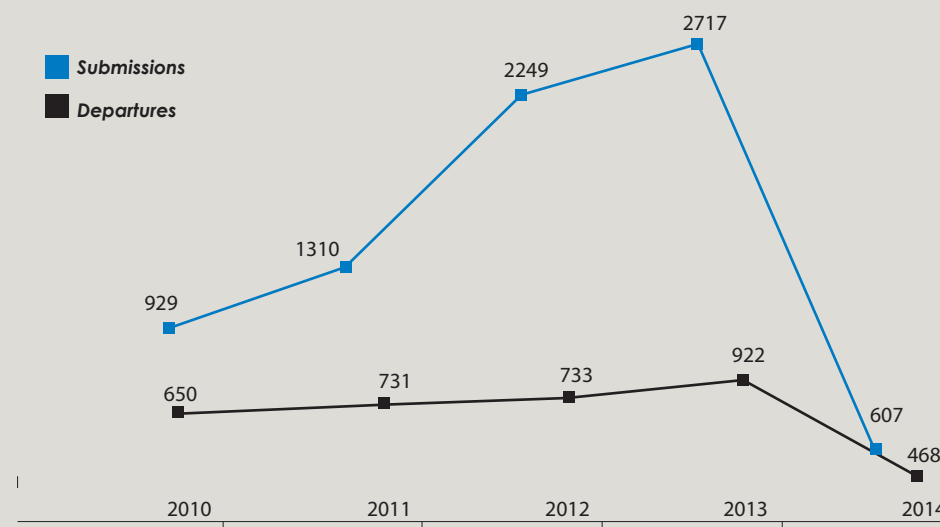
In addition to the enhancement of the resettlement program through the implementation of the P2 program, P1 referrals continue to be submitted on a regular basis from Kiziba, Gihembe and Nyabiheke refugee camps as well as the urban caseload in Kigali.

### 2013 Resettlement Submission Status

	P2	P1	
2013 Quarters	#Individuals	#Individuals	Cumulative Total
1 <sup>st</sup>	709	293	1002
2 <sup>nd</sup>	619	75	694
3 <sup>rd</sup>	422	160	582
4 <sup>th</sup>	303	136	439
Total	2053	664	2717

**113%**  
of the annual  
target for 2013  
achieved

### Resettlement Trends in Rwanda from 2010 - 2014



<sup>2</sup> Mudende was a refugee camp hosting Congolese refugees from eastern DRC who were forced to flee around 1996/1997. In August and December of 1997 armed groups from DRC attacked the camp and killed hundreds of refugees. The survivors were relocated to Gihembe, Nyabiheke camps- away from the border. Survivors of the massacre form 99% of Gihembe's current population.



H.E. Donald W. Koran

United States Ambassador to Rwanda

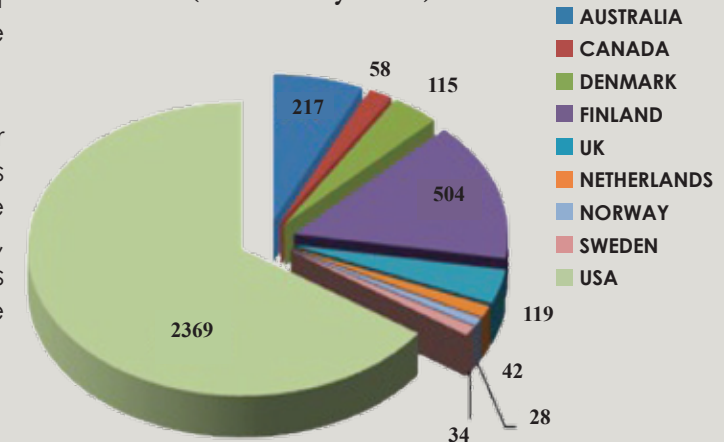
*"The United States strongly supports the goals of the Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework, among which are the establishment of security conditions in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, which are conducive to the return of refugees. While the return of refugees to their homes and livelihoods or local integration are preferred solutions, we recognize that in certain contexts resettlement to third countries is necessary. The United States has a strong and ongoing program to offer resettlement for specific refugee groups in Rwanda and throughout the world, and we are proud to work with UNHCR and the Government of Rwanda to provide support to all refugees living inside Rwanda's borders."*

**The United States is by far the leading resettlement country, receiving more than half of all refugees resettled worldwide each year through UNHCR.**

Resettlement is by definition a partnership activity, and the effective collaboration between resettlement partners is essential to being able to offer refugees the opportunity to rebuild their lives in a third country.

The "traditional" resettlement States (due to their longstanding participation) consist of the United States of America, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden). Some of these countries are partnered with Rwanda for the Congolese resettlement processing, as indicated in the pie chart.

Departures of Congolese refugees from Rwanda (2010 - May 2014)



## The United States Resettlement Program

The United States is UNHCR Rwanda's main resettlement partner. When UNHCR refers a refugee applicant to the United States for resettlement, the case is first received and processed by a Resettlement Support Center (RSC). The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) funds and manages nine RSCs offices around the world, operated by international and nongovernmental organizations. Under PRM's guidance, the RSCs prepare eligible refugee applications for U.S. resettlement consideration, with the help of UNHCR and other partners such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and host governments.

Since 1975, the United States has welcomed over 3 million refugees from all over the world. Every year, the United States provides resettlement opportunities to thousands of the world's most vulnerable refugees, in a program endorsed by the President (and every President since 1980) through an annual determination. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) resettled over 58,000 refugees in the United States in 2012.

In Fiscal Year (FY), 2013 the ceiling for refugee arrivals from Africa was 12,000.

In October of 2013 the President signed the Presidential Determination for the FY 2014 Refugee Admissions Program which included an increase in the number of admissions from Africa as per the below.

The current allocations for 2014 are:

- Africa - 15,000
- East Asia - 14,000
- Europe & Central Asia - 1,000
- Latin America/Caribbean - 5,000
- Near East/South Asia - 33,000
- Unallocated Reserve - 2,000

More than 280,000 African refugees have been admitted to the United States for resettlement. In Africa, thus far, the largest groups have been Somalis (more than 100,000) followed by Ethiopians (nearly 50,000), but also included are Sudanese, Liberians, Congolese, Eritreans, Rwandans, Sierra Leoneans, Burundians, among others.

## Rwanda

The Government of Rwanda plays an invaluable role in supporting the provision of protection and assistance to refugees. In addition to helping maintain the civilian character of the camps, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs (MIDIMAR) provides overall coordination with UNHCR including camp management and authorization for camp visits to carry out resettlement country missions.

Another key government partner is the Directorate of the Immigration and Emigration Services, as they issue exit Visas to all refugees departing for resettlement.

## RSC Africa

RSC Africa is based in Nairobi, Kenya and operated by Church World Service (CWS), as part of a cooperative agreement with PRM. RSC Africa is tasked with coordinating the refugee case preparation, post-adjudication processing, and cultural orientation in sub-Saharan Africa.

*“Resettlement of Congolese refugees from the Great Lakes region is one of the priorities for RSC Africa over the next few years. This past year we intensified processing in Rwanda and we are now witnessing an increase in departures. For many Congolese refugees, it has been a very long journey and they*



**Robin Dunn Marcos**  
RSC Africa Director  
Kenya

*have endured horrors beyond comprehension. Resettlement in the United States provides an opportunity to start anew - achieving the American dream is truly possible.”*

### Other key partners in Rwanda include:

- **American Refugee Committee (ARC)** – Provides medical referrals
- **African Humanitarian Action (AHA)** – Provides medical referrals
- **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** – Provides logistical support for selection missions, medical screening and facilitation of refugee departures
- **US Resettlement Support Center (RSC) Africa** – Conducts USA resettlement country interviews and enhances UNHCR capacity through caseworker deployments
- **Rwanda Red Cross** – Offers interview sites and refugee accommodation during selection missions and prior to departures

## United States of America

In the USA, there are nine domestic non-governmental organizations, with a total of about 350 local resettlement offices across the United States.

The nine National Refugee Resettlement Agencies in the USA include:

- Church World Service (CWS)
- Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM)
- Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc. (ECDC)
- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)
- International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS)
- U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)
- World Relief (WR)

### U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)

*“USCRI is heartened by the vision that has been put in place in the Rwandan refugee camps, through the leadership of the Government of Rwanda and UNHCR.*

USCRI still continues to fight the ingrained perception that a refugee camp is a short-term set-up to provide immediate protection. Unfortunately, camps are not usually short-term because the destabilized countries from which refugees flee, do not fix themselves in a hurry. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burma, Somalia and Syria are good examples.

Peace and stability for most countries torn apart by war and civil strife is a decade's long struggle. And yet, when you suggest that a child arriving today at a camp reception area somewhere in the world will still be stuck in the camp until 2034 (twenty years later)... it seems unimaginable. But, sadly, it's likely to be true for the majority. If every time a refugee camp was created, the planning assumed the

refugees would be in exile for the next twenty years, wouldn't it make sense to follow the exemplary refugee model in Rwanda and integrate key services into the national system for example: school enrolment for children and reinforcing national health service centers? This approach might also pave the way to peace, as locally educated and integrated children could eventually return home to lead their country to a better way forward.

While permanent and full local integration into Rwanda may not be viewed as a viable durable solution by the Government, what has been put in place for refugees is humane, cost effective, and should be encouraged elsewhere.”

**Alison Seiler of USCRI-Director of Administration**

*In 2013, a delegation of USCRI officials visited Rwanda to familiarize themselves with UNHCR work and resettlement processing. The goal of the mission was to gather information about Congolese refugees in order to aid the resettlement process in the United States.*

The United States is a land of great diversity, and refugees can be found in communities across the country and in all 50 states. Refugees may be resettled in small towns, big cities, or suburban communities. A refugee with close relatives already in the United States will be resettled where their relatives live, when possible. Otherwise, their location is determined through a regular allocation process which involves all nine of the national resettlement agencies that will decide the best placement site based on the availability of jobs, housing, and social services.

Like other refugee groups, and as can be expected, Congolese refugees tend to arrive in the USA with their own expectations, despite attending counselling and Cultural Orientation (CO) classes prior to their arrival. Also, as with other refugee groups arriving in the US for the first time, Congolese refugees may expect goods and services that the agencies cannot provide. As with other refugee populations, newly arrived Congolese refugees will require repeated orientation on a variety of topics in order to facilitate their resettlement and adjustment to life in the USA.

## Services in the USA

Upon arrival in the USA, one of the local resettlement agencies takes over the responsibility of the refugee family, through a combination of government funding and private resources. Depending on the state, various programs are in place to assist with the refugee's integration into their new community as quickly as possible. Each family is assigned a caseworker who ensures that all of the family's immediate needs are taken care of in the first 30 days of arrival, such as shelter, food, medical care, assistance with transportation, etc. Refugees are provided financial assistance for a short period of time after arrival. Both men and women refugees are expected to find employment as quickly as possible, even within the family's first month in the country.

All resettled refugees are encouraged to study English and most communities have programs established where the refugees can attend English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes for free. Children are enrolled in public schools soon after arrival through the help of their caseworker. Refugees will also enjoy the freedom to practice their own religion and to maintain cultural identity and (legal) traditions. It is important to understand that resettlement is a permanent solution. Within one year of arrival, refugees must apply for permanent residency and will be eligible to apply for citizenship as soon as 5 years after arrival.



A young refugee ready to depart to the USA



## Questions / Concerns shared by Congolese refugees during Counselling & CO classes:

- Fear of facing racism and religious discrimination,
- Finding a Congolese spouse,
- Meeting perpetrators of violence in the resettlement country,
- Cold weather,
- Ability to adopt to the strange/ different foods,
- How to appropriately discipline a child,
- Concerns around burial procedures,
- Not finding a job.



## FROM KIZIBA CAMP TO NORTH CAROLINA

### A human story

L-R: Faustin (head of family), Emmanuel (son), Bruno (grandson) and Alphonsine (daughter) in their apartment in North Carolina.

After living in Kiziba refugee camp for 17 years, Faustin and his 6 children (and 1 grandson) have finally begun their new lives in Greensboro, North Carolina.

**“ WE ARE HAPPY TO BE SAFE HERE.”  
- FAUSTIN**

Although the family has faced many challenges with their new lives in the US, what Faustin says that he likes best is that “we are safe here and we are happy to be safe here.”

Like other US nationals, finding employment remains a struggle in the current US economic situation. The high rates of unemployment have forced many refugee families to relocate within the US, causing an increase in out migration after initial resettlement. Consequently, since arrival, two of Faustin's daughters have moved to Kentucky in search of better opportunities. Additionally, large family sizes put pressure on finding suitable and affordable housing. Faustin is residing in a two bedroom apartment with his three teenage sons, his young adult daughter and her baby.

Faustin's other daughter, Alphonsine, who is in her early 20s, was initially hired at the Sheraton Hotel until she was let go due to her limited English abilities.

Although Alphonsine and her father are currently both unemployed, they realize the importance of securing early employment in order to enhance self-sufficiency, which is key to a successful resettlement.

Since Alphonsine lost her job at the hotel she began attending English classes with her father. The classes are free and offered through the New Arrivals Institute (NAI), a non-profit community organization whose mission is to assist refugees and immigrants with self-sufficiency and US Citizenship through education. NAI also provides transportation to Alphonsine and her father to and from classes, as well as childcare for Faustin's grandson Bruno while his mother is in class. Alphonsine states that they are slowly learning English and increasing their speaking abilities.

Faustin's three teenage boys are all happily attending a public school which provides English immersion programming for newly arrived refugee and immigrant children in Greensboro.

Alphonsine states that, “The best thing about the US is how the kids have good education. They learn more here and have support. My father did not go to school, but now his children and grandchildren can.”

After school, the boys walk over to the Ashton Woods Community Center, which offers tutoring and help with homework, one of the many programs provided by the Center for New North Carolinians. The center, serving families in the apartment complex as well as other refugee/immigrant families in the surrounding community, also provides English, Employment, Education and Health services, as well as cultural brokering.

Despite the family's financial challenges and housing constraints, they are happy to be living near other Congolese families. Local resettlement agencies in NC and other states strive to resettle refugee populations together so that the families in the community can better assist the refugee and immigrant populations.

Alphonsine confirms, “We are grateful to be in North Carolina. And we are happy to be with other Congolese here because we speak the same language and we can support each other.”

*North Carolina is one of the top ten resettlement states in the USA, resettling between 2000-2500 refugees annually. In the last few years the major refugee populations resettling in the state have been Burmese and Bhutanese, followed by refugees from Central Africa (including Congolese) and Iraqis.*

**KIZIBA CAMP WHERE FAUSTIN AND HIS  
FAMILY LIVED FOR 17 YEARS.**

# Final Thoughts



**George Okoth-Obbo**

*Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa  
Geneva*

"The plight of millions of refugees throughout the world who live in protracted refugee situations is one of UNHCR's and the international community's greatest challenges. Addressing this challenge can only be achieved through collaboration with various partners and requires robust international commitment. In this regard, resettlement can be a tangible expression of international solidarity and a responsibility sharing mechanism, allowing states to help share responsibility for refugee protection, and reduce problems impacting the country of asylum."

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**Volker Türk**

*Director of International Protection  
Geneva*

"Resettlement not only provides critical protection and a durable solution for refugees in greatest need, but also serves as an important demonstration of international solidarity and equitable burden sharing with countries hosting the vast majority of the world's refugees. In helping to ease the pressures associated with receiving and accommodating large numbers of refugees, resettlement may also help to create space for strengthened protection for the refugees who remain in their host countries."

This publication was prepared by Erika Fitzpatrick, Kristina Bailey and Paul Kenya with the support of the Resettlement team in Rwanda and UNHCR colleagues in the field, including the Regional Support Hub and Headquarters.

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