



## Communities Forced to Accept Refugees With Little Say

The descriptive article about the [U.S. Refugees Admissions Program \(USRAP\) found on the State Department website](#) states: “Though Congress mandated the program, it is local communities that have ensured the success of the resettlement program by welcoming and helping refugees from around the world.”

Though the idea of Americans across our nation extending a warm welcome to refugees from around the world seeking asylum from oppression and an opportunity to start a new life sounds generous and charitable, an article in the *Concord* (New Hampshire) *Monitor* on March 29 laments that local officials have little say in how many refugees they must accept. (It might also have asked if communities should not have the right to accept none at all, if that is their wish.) The article cites a complaint by Concord City Manager Tom Aspell that federal officials responsible for settling the refugees rarely contact his office to discuss important matters, such as the current status of the local economy or what resources are available, before making their decisions.

By its nature, the concept of “welcoming” implies that those doing the welcoming have done so out of their own sense of charity, which is always a *voluntary* act. From the description of how the program is being handled in Concord, at least, it sounds as though federal officials and the private agencies the feds contract with to implement the program are not giving local communities the opportunity to be charitable. The *Monitor* report notes that the city of Concord has “minimal say, and minimal official responsibilities, over refugee resettlement.”

Despite being given little input into the process, city officials responsible for public assistance programs are doing their share to provide help to refugees.

“We just do what we normally do for anybody else that comes in,” Jacqueline Whatmough, the city’s human services director, told the *Monitor*.

The *Monitor* reported that the national refugee resettlement program is operated as a partnership between the federal government and nine private resettlement agencies. One of these, Ascentria Care Alliance, which is a subsidiary of three of those private agencies, oversees resettlement in Concord.





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The report noted that the largest numbers of refugees arriving in New Hampshire currently come from Bhutan, the Congo, and Iraq, but that Syrian refugees could begin arriving in the state within the next couple of years. The article reported that “the UNHCR hopes to resettle 130,000 Syrian refugees globally by 2016,” but did not identify what the UNHCR is and what role it plays in refugee resettlement. Information about this agency found on the [State Department website](#) helps provide a better picture of the UN’s role in international migration.

UNHCR stands for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, UNHCR is mandated to protect and assist refugees — either at the request of a government or the UN itself. It aids refugees in their voluntary repatriation or resettlement to another country.

The State Department says that when UNHCR or, occasionally, a U.S. Embassy or a specially trained NGO, refers a refugee applicant to the United States for resettlement,

the case is first received and processed by a Resettlement Support Center (RSC). The State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) funds and manages nine RSCs around the world, operated by international and nongovernmental organizations and one U.S. interests section. Under PRM’s guidance, the RSCs prepare eligible refugee applications for U.S. resettlement consideration.

The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is comprised of several elements, including agencies from three different federal departments — State, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services. Though the program’s directors welcome “thousands of private citizens who volunteer their time and skills to help refugees resettle in the United States,” the experience in New Hampshire and in other places indicates that program planning is routinely done from the top down, with little regard for how resettlement impacts each local community.

Another article on the State Department’s website explains how the department’s [Reception and Placement program](#) works. It notes:

The Department of State works with nine domestic resettlement agencies that have proven knowledge and resources to resettle refugees. Every week, representatives of each of these nine agencies meet to review the biographic information and other case records sent by the overseas Resettlement Support Centers (RSC) to determine where a refugee will be resettled in the United States.

Note that it is the nine agencies that determine where a refugee will be resettled in the United States — not the communities that will receive the refugees and be faced with providing the many social services that government is expected to provide in today’s culture.

The American people have always been generous with their time and money in helping those less fortunate than themselves, including millions of refugees overseas and those refugees who have come to build new lives in the United States. Most of this help has been rendered through private and church-affiliated organizations.

However, it is reasonable to ask that local communities be given a say into whether or not they feel capable of absorbing refugees into their community, and how many refugees each feels comfortable in accommodating. Furthermore, that process should *begin* at the local level — not end there.

While local communities should be free to voluntarily offer their hospitality to refugees, if their



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residents are inclined to do so, they should not be placed at the mandatory receiving end of a process initiated by the UN and controlled by the federal government.

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