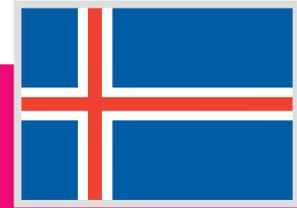


Iceland at a glance



- **Population:** 319 575
- **GDP (per capita):** 111 PPS (available for 2011 only)
PPS=Purchasing Power Standard, based on the EU 27 average of 100
- **Asylum applications total:** 105
- **Total decisions reached in 2012:** 50
- **Positive decisions (refugee status, subsidiary protection and humanitarian reasons):** 17 total
(16 recognised refugees, 1 humanitarian protection)

2012 data, published by Eurostat in May 2013

The Icelandic resettlement programme at a glance

Resettlement quota and actors

Start of annual quota: 1996

Current quota: Quota currently under revision. In 2012 Iceland received 9 resettled refugees.

Main national actors: Icelandic Refugee Committee - comprising Ministry of Welfare, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Icelandic Red Cross; municipalities.

Resettlement numbers

YEAR	ACCEPTED	ARRIVALS	NATIONALITY ⇄ COUNTRY OF ASYLUM OF LARGEST GROUPS
2013	-	-	-
2012	9	9	Afghans ⇄ Iran
2011	0	0	
2010		6	Colombians ⇄ Ecuador
2008		29	Palestinians (ex-Iraq) ⇄ Al Waleed camp (Syria)

UNHCR Submission categories considered for resettlement

- Legal and physical protection needs
- Survivors of violence and torture
- Medical needs
- Women and girls at risk
- Family reunification
- Children and adolescents at risk
- Lack of foreseeable alternative solutions

UNHCR Priority levels accepted (with sub-quota where applicable)

- Emergency** *max. 7 days between submission and resettlement*
- Urgent** *within 6 weeks between submission and resettlement*
- Normal** *within 12 months between submission and resettlement*

Iceland's Resettlement Programme

Legal Basis

Article 51 of the [Icelandic Act on Foreigners 96/2002](#) provides that the Icelandic Directorate of Immigration may authorise groups of refugees to enter Iceland in accordance with a decision by the government acting on a proposal from the Icelandic Refugee Committee. The Committee is a consultative body with membership from the Ministries of Welfare, Foreign Affairs and Interior, and the Icelandic Red Cross. The Committee is responsible for the selection of resettled refugees, but the Directorate of Immigration takes all final resettlement decisions.

Individuals are recognised as refugees via the legal provisions set out in Article 51 of the Act on Foreigners. Article 48 of the same Act provides for the issue of a travel document to refugees.

Resettlement Criteria

Basic criteria

A resettled refugee must be recognised as such according to the 1951 Convention on Refugee Status.

Criteria related to integration

None.

Identification and Selection

The [Icelandic Refugee Committee](#) receives resettlement submissions

from UNHCR and selects cases to be interviewed during selection missions. Selection missions are led by the Ministry of Welfare, with representation from the Directorate of Immigration and the Icelandic Red Cross. In 2008, processing time from submission to departure for refugees selected during selection missions was **3-4 months**.⁴²

In light of the **financial crisis** affecting Iceland (and many European countries) from 2008-9, in 2010 and 2012, Iceland selected refugees on a **dossier basis** so as to remove costs associated with selection missions, which were felt to be unjustified given the small numbers of refugees due to be resettled. The Refugee Committee conducted selection interviews via skype for the dossier caseload in 2012.

Refugee Status, Permanent Residency & Citizenship

On arrival into Iceland, resettled refugees are granted full refugee status and receive a **temporary residence card** valid for 4 years. After this period, refugees who have completed 250 hours of Icelandic language lessons may apply for permanent residence.

⁴² On April 17th, 2008 it was agreed by the refugee committee to suggest to the government to invite 30 refugees from Palestine to Iceland. The memo went to the Minister of Social Affairs and Foreign Affairs on May 5th. The RRF files arrive after that period and on June 6th, the selection mission went to Al-Waleed. The resettled refugee group arrived in Iceland on September 8th.

After 5 years of continuous residency, refugees in Iceland may apply for Icelandic citizenship. Applicants must demonstrate a minimum A2 level proficiency⁴³ in the Icelandic language.

Family reunification

Besides married partners, children under 18 and parents of children under 18, other family members who are eligible for family reunification are unmarried partners, including same-sex partners, if the relationship has existed for at least 2 years. Refugees are not obliged to provide proof of income or accommodation sufficient to meet the needs of incoming family members.

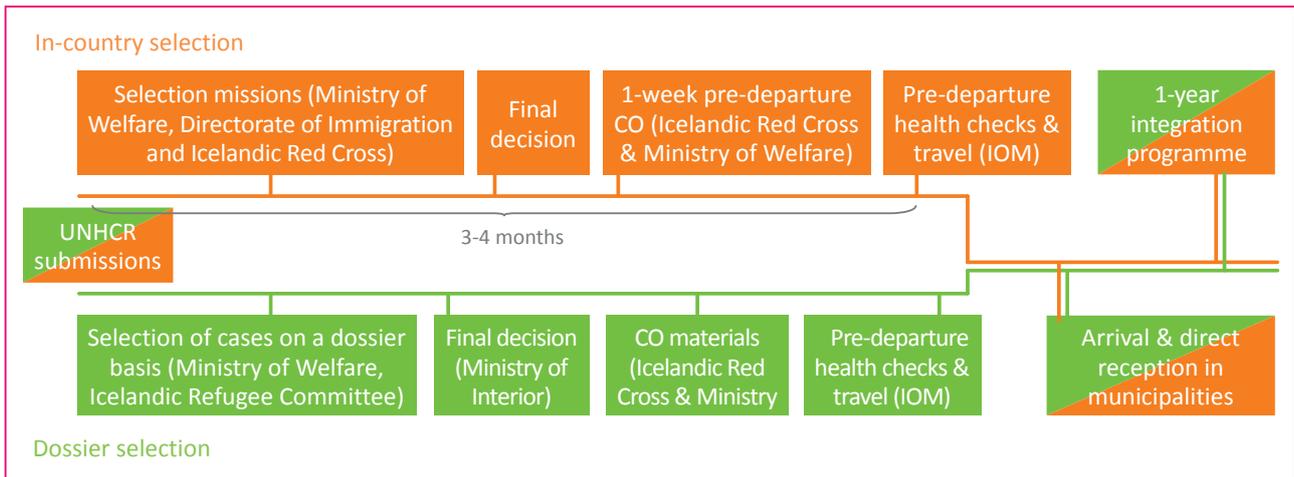
Resettlement in Practice

Linking Phases

How is information transferred between selection and reception of refugees in order to prepare for their arrival?

- Forwarding pertinent information from Refugee Referral Form (RRF) to integration actors. Resettled refugees are asked to sign a letter that gives permission for information on RRFs to be shared ahead of their

⁴³ Common European Framework of Reference for Languages



arrival with social workers assigned to them. This includes information on medical needs.

- ☑ Other: Employees of schools and kindergartens that receive resettled children are provided with general information about the background of the incoming refugee group, and specific information on the individual children they are due to receive.

Pre-departure

- ☑ **Cultural Orientation:** Pre-2010, the Icelandic Red Cross and Ministry of Welfare provided pre-departure CO for refugees selected for resettlement during selection missions. For the 2010 and 2012 programmes, UNHCR provided refugees with printed CO materials developed by the Icelandic Red Cross and Ministry of Welfare.

- ☑ **Medical Exam:** IOM

- ☑ **Travel arrangements:** IOM

Integration in Practice

Reception

Refugees are welcomed on arrival at the airport by representatives of the **Icelandic Red Cross** and receiving municipality, who accompany them directly to the municipality. Refugees receive an introduction briefing by a resettlement project manager based in the Ministry of Welfare.

Placement policies

Prior to refugees' arrival, the Icelandic Refugee Committee contacts local municipalities and proposes placement. Municipalities **voluntarily** decide to receive refugees - should they do so, they sign an agreement with the Ministry of Welfare stipulating the financial resources that the municipality will receive to enable the provision of integration services. Each arrival group of refugees is placed in the same municipality. Since the

resettlement programme began, 11 of the 74 Icelandic municipalities have agreed to receive resettled refugees.

Integration services & support

Length: 1 year

Municipalities and the Icelandic Red Cross are responsible for implementing the integration programme for resettled refugees during the first 12 months after arrival. The programme is overseen and coordinated by the Icelandic Refugee Committee.

Housing for resettled refugees is provided by the receiving municipality, generally in the form of an apartment furnished by the Icelandic Red Cross as part of a broader contract with the Ministry of Welfare (see below). In addition to housing, municipalities are responsible for language courses, financial support, psychological assessment and social counselling provided during the first 12 months.

Financial support, also for the first 12 months, is set at a level determined as adequate for health and general living expenses by social services in the receiving municipality. This support ceases after 12 months, and resettled refugees are then eligible to receive the same level of financial assistance as other Icelandic residents with similar/the same needs. **Language courses**

include both classroom lessons and individual private lessons, and are provided for an initial period of 6 months. Classroom learning provision during this initial period is three hours per day, for four days per week.

The Icelandic Red Cross is contracted by the Ministry of Welfare to provide a range of services and functions within the resettlement programme, largely delivered by local branches in receiving municipalities. These include furnishing accommodation, meeting refugees at the airport on arrival, coordinating volunteers and conducting **evaluation interviews** with refugees at programmed intervals during the first 18 months after arrival. Local branches also provide general assistance, act as advocates for refugees in exchanges with local service providers and organise activities to encourage social integration and inclusion. The latter includes the 'local support families' initiative (see 'Integration in Focus', below) that forms a fundamental part of the Icelandic reception and integration system for resettled refugees.

INTEGRATION IN FOCUS: Local Support Families - Icelandic Red Cross

The 'Local Support Families' initiative is implemented by the Icelandic Red Cross (IRC) in all municipalities that receive resettled refugees. The local IRC branch recruits local people as **volunteer 'friends' or 'families'** to



assist resettled refugees to orient themselves into their local community after arrival, for example by finding the best places to shop for groceries, understanding local holidays and accessing sporting and social activities. Each refugee is provided with 3-5 support families or friends, and refugee children and young people are specifically matched with volunteers of their own age. The programme aims to prevent social isolation, aid integration and settlement and build friendship and understanding amongst local people and resettled refugees.

Evaluations

The **Icelandic Red Cross** is contracted by the Ministry of Welfare to conduct three evaluation interviews with each adult resettled to Iceland - one at six months, another at twelve months, and the final interview approximately 24 months after arrival. Interviews explore many individual aspects of resettlement to Iceland, including how individual refugees feel about living in Iceland, how language-learning is progressing, how children are settling into school, plans for the future and if refugees are in contact with Icelanders, Red Cross support families and/or family and friends in their country of origin. Interviews also provide

opportunities for refugees to comment on the usefulness of the resettlement programme itself. The outcomes of the evaluation process are reported internally by the Ministry of Welfare and are not made available to the wider public.

Strengths and Challenges

Strengths:

- Although the Icelandic programme receives small numbers of resettled refugees by comparison to other European countries, the programme is characterised by **close cooperation** amongst all stakeholders, including NGOs, central and local government and local communities.
- The Icelandic resettlement programme is the only European programme in which an NGO, the **Icelandic Red Cross**, has a formal role in the selection of resettled refugees (via the Icelandic Refugee Committee).

Challenges:

- The **roles of the different organisations** involved in the resettlement programme are not always clear amongst the organisations themselves, refugees resettled to Iceland or for the general public.

- The Icelandic population is very small, and appropriate **interpreters** are not always available in the municipalities that receive resettled refugees.

New Developments

In 2013, a new Project Manager post has been created within the Ministry of Welfare to coordinate the resettlement programme. The postholder will also work with on programmes for refugees granted protection in Iceland through the asylum system.