

Rights & Responsibilities

Those who arrive with a positive attitude and an open mind often have the most success in resettlement. Trying to put forth your best efforts, taking the first job that is offered to you, and learning to be self-sustainable will allow you to be your own best resource and ease your resettlement process.

Resettlement is a long process that requires dedication, hard work, patience, self-reliance, and a desire to become independent. Different people will tell you different things. It is important to realize that not everything you hear is or will be true, and that things change between states and communities.

All people are considered equal in the United States. You will have freedom and rights, but along with those come responsibilities. If you do not practice being responsible, you may lose some of your freedom and rights. The only thing that changes your rights from those of others is based on your immigration status*:

Status:	Refugee	Legal Permanent Resident (LPR)	Citizen
Eligibility:	Receive upon arrival	Apply within 1 year	Can apply after 5 years
Document:	I-94	Green Card	Passport
Rights: (which increase)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel in U.S. • Obtain social security card • Be employed • Attend school • Own property • Hold driver's license • Basic human rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel outside U.S. with Refugee Travel Document • Join U.S. military 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel freely • Vote • Full social security benefits after 7 years
Restrictions; cannot: (which decrease)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel out of U.S. without special permission • Join military • Vote • Hold government jobs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold some government jobs • Vote 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be President, Vice President, or Secretary of State for the United States government

Entry into the U.S. is conditional. If you violate the regulations set forth by breaking the law, you might have to pay a fine, serve time in jail, not be able to advance your immigration status, or be deported. If you are accused of a crime, you are considered innocent until proven guilty, and you have the right to representation in court.

Make sure you have met your responsibilities before demanding your rights. Thus, it is important to be aware of what your responsibilities are, and what rights you are entitled to. Some of your responsibilities, aside from abiding by the laws, are to:

- Find employment, the sooner the better. You can work with your resettlement agency for assistance. Your first job most likely will not be your last, and you can change jobs if offered a better one. However, you should give at least 2 weeks' notice before leaving. Every employed individual must pay taxes.
- The lease you sign with the landlord of your apartment.
- Bring an initial supply of medications and relevant prescriptions.

* Courtesy of *The Status Game* by CWS OPE Accra, http://www.cal.org/co/overseas/toolkit/rights/CWS_Accra-Rights-The_Status_Game.doc

This document was developed with guidance from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services *Basic Orientation for Cuban Entrants (Parolees)* document, with funding from the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, United States Department of State, but does not necessarily represent the policy of that agency and the reader should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

Laws in the U.S. are non-discriminatory and are in place for everyone's well-being. You are free to express your ideas and opinions, and to follow the religion of your choice in the U.S. It is important to keep in mind that police in the U.S. are there to help. Laws differ between communities and states, but in general:

- To operate a car, you must have a U.S.-issued driver's license with you. Everyone in the car is required by law to wear a safety belt, and appropriate child safety seats are required. Driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs is also illegal.
- The consumption of alcohol is illegal for anyone under the age of 21. Being drunk in public and drinking alcohol in public places or in the street is illegal.
- Smoking is illegal for anyone under the age of 18. Smoking in public buildings, the workplace, and in public and private offices is prohibited. It is often appreciated if you do not smoke in private homes, and asking before smoking to ensure it is permitted and accepted demonstrates respect.
- Children 6-16 years old are required by law to attend school, which is the responsibility of their parents.
- All males between the ages of 18 and 25 in the United States must register with the Selective Service, a government agency which can call individuals for military service. Currently, all members of the U.S. armed forces are volunteers.

It is generally illegal to:

- Disturb the peace.
- Verbally or physically abuse your family, children, or spouse. Parents in the U.S. discipline their children by discussing right versus wrong, taking away privileges, or giving "time out" from activities.
- Leave children below the age of 12 years unattended.
- Not support your biological child, even in the case of separation or divorce.
- Have sexual relations with a minor (generally anyone under the age of 18).
- Have more than one spouse.
- Comment or behave offensively or in a sexual nature in the workplace.
- Shoplift, or steal what is not yours from others.
- Traffic, purchase, sell, and/or use narcotics or other addictive drugs or controlled substances.
- Urinate in public.
- Own firearms, and hunt or fish without proper licenses and in the off-season.
- Beat, neglect, abuse, or sacrifice an animal.
- Litter (throw trash or garbage anywhere other than in designated areas), which is also considered culturally inappropriate.
- Bribe police officers and other public officials.

You will be assigned to a community and a resettlement agency. The agency may be a religious organization, a private organization, a state agency, or an ethnic organization; however, you are not required to take part in any religious activities. This agency will be responsible for greeting you at the airport, and assisting you with initial housing and basic necessities. The quantity and quality of items may vary. There is limited assistance available, and it differs between states, communities, and agencies. However, if you choose to move away from that community, you will most likely not have assistance from a resettlement agency. If you break the law, the resettlement agency cannot help you.

Learning English is very important and will assist you in succeeding in the United States. Many refugees find it possible to work and study English when not working. English classes are offered at various venues in most communities; your resettlement agency can refer you.

Remember: You are your own best resource.