

Other benefits:

- **“Green Card”:** (Also known as your *permanent resident card*.) After one year of physical presence in the U.S.—starting from the date you were granted asylum—you are eligible to apply for your green card. It is important to apply as soon as possible after you become eligible because it can take many years for the card to be issued. Also, green cards are issued to asylees in the order in which applications are received, so many others may be ahead of you in the process. It is very important to get your green card as the first step to becoming an U.S. citizen.
- **Supplemental Security Income.** If you an asylee who is 65 or older, or disabled, you are eligible to apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). You can do so at the local Social Security Administration office. For information on the nearest location, call 1-800-772-1213, or go to the website at www.ssa.gov, and click on the local office locator. Note that unless you become a citizen or have worked in the U.S. for at least 5 years as a legal permanent resident, you are eligible to receive SSI for no longer than 7 years. If you are near to your seven-year limit, please call MORA at 767-7514.
- **Family Reunification.** For information about low cost or free legal assistance to bring your spouse or children to the U.S., call MORA at 767-7514. Leave your phone number or your e-mail address. Remember that you must apply within the first 2 years after being granted asylum.

STATE OF MARYLAND

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Martin O'Malley, *Governor*

Anthony G. Brown, *Lieutenant Governor*

Theodore Dallas, *Secretary*

MARYLAND OFFICE FOR REFUGEES AND ASYLEES

311 West Saratoga Street

Baltimore, MD 21201



Information for Asylees in Maryland

A Short Guide to Benefits and Resources



Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees

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What is an asylee?

An asylee is legally defined as a person who flees his or her country and is unable or unwilling to return due to persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. The persecution may be on the basis of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a social group. An asylee enters the United States and then requests permission to stay by applying for asylum.

Only the federal government and federal courts may grant asylum. Most asylum grants (about 70%) are handled by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services or “CIS” (formerly called “INS”), which has eight regional asylum offices throughout the U.S. Most other asylum grants (about 30%) are handled by the immigration courts, which are located in cities throughout the U.S.

Where do I have to be living to receive services in the area?

If you live in one of the following six areas of Maryland, and you have status as an asylee, you may be eligible for free services at the Baltimore Resettlement Center:

- Anne Arundel County
- Baltimore City
- Baltimore County
- Carroll County
- Harford County
- Howard County

If you do not live in the area served by the Baltimore Resettlement Center, call the Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees (MORA) at 410-767-7514 and ask for information on where you can apply for asylee benefits.

provider. For information on its list of legal providers, visit www.probonomd.org/forclients.html

Baltimore City Community College offers a variety of academic programs for those who are interested in entering a new career or in obtaining certification in a former field. For more information, call 410-462-8000 or visit www.bccc.edu/.

Legal Aid Bureau, Inc. provides free civil (cases not involving crimes) legal services for low-income people meeting eligibility guidelines. For more information, call 410-951-7777 or visit www.mdlab.org/Offices.html.

The Women’s Law Center of Maryland, Inc. is a non-profit organization that provides legal services and advocacy to protect and promote the rights of women and children. One of the center’s initiatives is the Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Project (MEDOVI), a program that focuses exclusively on the special needs of foreign-born victims of domestic violence. MEDOVI provides free legal representation to all foreign-born victims of domestic violence, who may call the hotline at 410-534-8800 and leave a message in English, Spanish, Russian, Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, French, Arabic, Farsi, Hindu or Urdu. For more information on the other programs offered by The Women’s Law Center of Maryland, call 410-321-8761 or visit www.wlcmd.org.

Additional Information

Documents that prove your asylum status

To be recognized as an asylee, you must have an Asylum Approval Letter issued by an INS/CIS Asylum Office, or an original version of an order of an immigration judge granting you asylum.

Documents that prove employment eligibility

- Unexpired Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
- Unrestricted Social Security card AND a driver’s license or ID card issued by a state

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- **The Baltimore City Department of Social Services (BCDSS)** provides services for preserving families and protecting vulnerable adults and children. You may contact them at 410-361-4600 or visit www.dhr.state.md.us/baltcity.htm.

A caseworker will help you receive assistance from one of the following non-profit agencies, which provide services to all eligible clients without regard to religion:

- **The International Rescue Committee (IRC)** assists refugees and asylees to achieve self-sufficiency and regain control of their lives. IRC offers case management, employment and resource development services. For more information, call 410-558-3179 or visit www.theirc.org/Baltimore/.
- **Church World Service** helps refugees and asylees face the challenges of adjustment to life in the U.S. You can contact them at 1-888-297-2767 (toll free number) or visit www.churchworldservice.org/Immigration/.
- **Jewish Family Services** provides family and individual support services to help you to become self-sufficient. For more information, call 410-542-6300 or visit www.jfs.org/.
- **Lutheran Social Services** helps refugees and asylees reach self-sufficiency by helping them find a job. For more information call 410-558-3181 or visit www.lssnca.org/refemplsvcs.htm

Other places providing services:

Advocates for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (ASTT) provides services to those who suffered physical and mental abuse in their home countries. Services including social work, psychotherapy and psychological assessment. This organization works primarily with people who are seeking asylum in the U.S. You can contact them at 410-464-9006 or www.astt.org/

Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland assists with referrals to pro bono legal services for those who cannot afford to hire a lawyer. For more information, call 410-837-9379 or the toll free number 1-800-492-1964. NOTE: The Pro Bono Resource Center is NOT a direct service

Benefits

As a new resident of Maryland, and a recognized asylee, you are eligible for the following services:

1. English Classes

You may enroll in FREE English classes to meet your language needs. Baltimore City Community College's Refugee Assistance Program offers beginning and intermediate English classes to help you improve your language skills. To register for *English as a Second Language* (ESL) classes, please call 410-986-5430.

2. Health Screening

This free assessment is provided by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and includes a physical examination; screening for tuberculosis, Hepatitis B and sexually transmitted diseases (STD); testing for parasites, and immunization for you and your children. In addition, you will be assessed for dental and vision problems. This health screening may also include preventive treatment and follow-up.

3. Medical Assistance

Medical Assistance is available for up to 8 months from the date you were granted asylum or until your income exceeds the program's income limits. In order to receive cash or Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA), you cannot be eligible for Medicaid.

4. Cash Assistance

Depending on where you live and whether you have your children with you, you may be eligible for short-term cash assistance. Since the cash amount provided is not sufficient to pay rent, you must find a job as soon as possible.

5. Food Stamps

Be aware that you may receive food stamps until your income exceeds program income limits. You may be eligible for this program only if your income is very low.

6. Match Grant Program

This program is offered for refugees and asylees who are good candidates for early employment. In other words, only those most likely to find a job

are eligible. The Match Grant Program provides cash and living assistance, job counseling, and placement for four months. Only a limited number of Match Grant slots are available. You must enroll within 30 days from the date your asylum is granted.

7. Employment Services

It is the purpose of the refugee/asylee program to help you to become self-sufficient as soon as possible. You will find that the short-term cash assistance programs are not enough to permit you to pay rent and meet other basic needs, such as food, health care, and clothing. You will need a job, and as an asylee you are authorized to work. Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area is funded by the Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees to help you to find work. To register for employment services, please call 410-558-3181.

For more information on all programs mentioned above, you may contact the *Baltimore Resettlement Center* at 410-558-3166.

The Baltimore Resettlement Center (BRC)

You should contact the BRC as soon as possible after you are granted asylum. At the BRC, you may obtain assistance and useful information in order to begin your life in the United States. The BRC is located at 3516 Eastern Avenue, near Conkling Street in southeast Baltimore (in the Highlandtown neighborhood.) Before going to the Center, call to make an appointment (410-558-3166 or 410-558-3169). Ask to speak to the Asylee Program Specialist or the Assistant Asylee Program Specialist. If you hear a recorded message, please leave your name and phone number, and say, "I am an asylee. I would like the asylee program specialist to call me back." If you are traveling to the Center from within Baltimore City, you can take the Number 10 bus and get off at Eastern Avenue and Conkling Street. The BRC is around the corner. When you come to the BRC, please bring as many as you have from the following documents:

- I-94 "Arrival – Departure Record"
- Original letter from a USCIS Asylum Office granting asylum ("Asylum Approval" notice)
- Original "Asylum Granted" letter from an immigration judge
- Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
- Proof of your address: utility or telephone bill with postmarked

envelope, checking or savings account statement with post-marked envelope or housing contract.

- Social Security card or a receipt showing that you have applied for it. Remember that you must apply for a Social Security card as soon as possible. You are authorized to receive an unrestricted Social Security card that establishes work authorization. In case you want information and directions to the Social Security office nearest you, call 1-800-772-1213 or visit: <http://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber>
You only need to give your U.S. Postal Service five-digit ZIP Code and you will get information about your local Social Security Office. If you do not receive your Social Security card within four weeks, please call the Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees at 410-767-7514.

Once you bring the documents you have to the Baltimore Resettlement Center, an asylee caseworker will do the following:

- Make copies of all your papers and, if necessary, ask you for additional information.
- Give you a detailed explanation of the asylee program and the services it provides.
- Introduce you to the staff of the Employment Services program if you do not yet have a job, or if you wish to get a better job.
- Introduce you to the staff of Baltimore Medical Systems for your initial medical screening appointment.
- Assist you to fill out a Request for Assistance forms and make an appointment with staff at the Center, who will determine your eligibility for Food Stamps, Medical and Cash Assistance and the Match Grant program.
- Help you to apply for other benefits.

The BRC is formed by the following public and private organizations:

- **The Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees (MORA)** provides support and services to refugees to ease their transition into American society, and serves as resource to the Governor and General Assembly on refugee and immigrant policy. For more information, call 410-767-7514 or visit <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/mora/index.php>