
U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
U.S. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM NEWS

Volume 2, Issue 4

September 1, 2004

RPC and WRAPS Make Refugee Program Work

It's Wednesday morning at the Refugee Processing Center (RPC) in Arlington, Va., and the weekly allocations meeting is underway. Ten voluntary resettlement agencies participate from either Arlington or New York—it is a video conference—and divide up hundreds of assurance-ready cases. The process is amazingly fast and efficient—like much of the work at the RPC.

This fiscal year, more than 50,000 refugees will be resettled in the United States. But before they are, they must be found, pre-screened for possible refugee status, interviewed by the Department of Homeland Security, subjected to security and medical checks, allocated to resettlement agencies, booked on flights and met in the United States.

The hub of this whole process is the RPC, staffed by 83 dedicated people (divided among Refugee Operations, Systems Operations, and Office Support). The hub of the RPC is WRAPS—the Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System. Together, they make the U.S. refugee program work.

Before the RPC, which became fully operational in 2002, there was a Refugee Data Center in New York. The overseas processing entities (OPEs—located in Moscow, Amman, Cairo, Nairobi, Accra, Frankfurt, Vienna, Belgrade, Istanbul, New Delhi, Ho Chi Minh City, Bangkok and Havana) entered refugee data at the site using software they developed. “Exchanging data electronically and providing the Department of State up-to-date refugee status information was problematic at best,” said RPC Program Manager Roger Sucharski. “Sites often measured data differently and missing data was not unusual.”

Today, OPE staff still enter refugee data at the site, but now they enter it into WRAPS software. Refugee



Video conference brings together resettlement agencies in Arlington, Va. and New York.

security name checks performed by the RPC go into WRAPS. So do the allocations to voluntary agencies. Basically, everything needed to adjudicate and track cases and generate reports goes into the system. Best of all, the data is standardized; everyone is using the same definitions and measurements. “WRAPS cost more and took longer than expected, but everyone is so excited to have it,” Sucharski said.

WRAPS is never more important than at crunch time—now. The last couple of months of the fiscal year, which ends September 30, are marked by a flurry of activity to process refugees and get them into the U.S. About 20 percent of the refugee admissions for this year will take place in the last month. WRAPS is used to generate weekly “pipeline” reports that help PRM program officers identify and pro-actively deal with bottlenecks to keep cases moving, said RPC Director Amy Nelson, a former program officer herself. (Frustrated by the need to go different places to get data, she persuaded PRM to fund the study that eventually led to the development of WRAPS.)



RPC Director Amy Nelson, left, confers with Refugee Operations Manager Susan David and Program Manager Roger Sucharski.

A late surge of arrivals is normal. What has made this year especially hard are some unique factors that came together to form a “perfect storm.” The pressure started to build as early as February, when PRM started to request daily reports on arrivals. (PRM in previous years had not requested daily reports until August.) In June, the RPC unexpectedly got tasked with doing security namechecks for Cuba cases, a time-consuming job complicated by the fact that Cuba is the one OPE not yet connected to WRAPS. At about the same time, the RPC was dealing with a huge influx of what would eventually be 15,000 Lao Hmong cases, putting pressure on allocations support staff, who had to increase allocations meetings from one to two per week; assurance processors; and namecheck staff. Since the Bangkok OPE temporarily grew tenfold to handle the load, the RPC deployed a WRAPS trainer and additional domestic operations staff to the OPE, taking away from already stretched RPC resources. Finally, a greater than usual number of expedited cases and special medical cases put additional strain on the harried but resourceful staff.

The RPC, though, is confident, based on its data, that the 50,000 allocated numbers for refugee admissions will be hit, and that even more refugees will be admitted by September 30—the flights are booked. Furthermore, the RPC sees a healthy pipeline building for the early months of next fiscal year, based on the number of refugees who have already been approved but are not travel ready.

Intern makes a real contribution

Few realize how important interns are to PRM in accomplishing its mission. These students bring youthful energy and passion to their assignments. They gain experience by doing substantive work that makes a difference in people’s lives.

A good example is Admissions intern Sun Bae, who has just finished a 13-week internship during which he worked closely with our staff, voluntary agencies, and other government departments on a variety of issues. One of the highlights was participating in a monitoring and evaluation trip to Chicago that involved home visits to refugees, caseworker interviews, and case file audits.



Sun Bae, left, participates in a meeting.

Perhaps Sun’s proudest achievement was working with the Department of Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration to track down and solve problems that were delaying the issuance of social security numbers to newly arrived refugees. By doing so, he put them on the road to jobs and self-sufficiency weeks earlier than they might have been otherwise.

Sun, the son of immigrants, hails from Seattle. He is pursuing a Masters degree in international peace and conflict resolution at American University. A self-described “people person,” he likes the idea of doing humanitarian work on a big stage, so hopes to continue working on refugee issues after graduation, perhaps with the State Department or an NGO. We thank him for a job well done. Best of luck, Sun!

PRM Recommendations Due Out Soon On Reception and Placement Proposals

During the week of August 16-20, the Office of Admissions convened a panel to review the 11 Reception and Placement proposals received for FY 2005. The panel included PRM staff, led by Jessica Yutacom; the Arizona state refugee coordinator; and a representative from the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement. The panel reviewed each agency's proposal in detail, to ensure that the capacity at headquarters and at each affiliate location is being used to best effect. PRM findings and recommendations to each agency in light of the panel's analysis will be forthcoming in the next month.

U.S. Remains Committed To Vibrant Admissions Program for FY 2005

The following is excerpted from Assistant Secretary Arthur E. Dewey's opening remarks at the Public Meeting on the FY 2005 Refugee Admissions Program at the Refugee Processing Center in Rosslyn, July 28, 2004 .

Thank you for all being here today to share your views on the Refugee Admissions Program in FY 2005. I see many familiar faces in the room and know that many of you have devoted many years to the important work of refugee resettlement.

I am pleased to report that the Administration remains committed to a vibrant, diverse and secure Refugee Admissions Program. It is a key element of U.S. humanitarian policy.

As I am sure you are aware, the two years following 9/11 were very difficult for the program. We have devoted significant energy, time and resources to recovery. During the past year, we have begun to realize the benefits of these extraordinary efforts.

We have succeeded in restoring the admissions pipeline and expect—barring significant unforeseen security setbacks—to reach or slightly exceed the FY 2004 allocated ceiling of 50,000.

Recent dramatic events have changed the landscape of the world's refugee population. Many large refugee populations have recently or are now repatriating voluntarily to their countries and no longer need third country resettlement.

Other groups have become refugees more recently or have been living in protracted refugee situations in which local integration is not a real solution. These groups require our attention and we are focusing our caseload identification effort on this expanded concept of rescue to reach several—often smaller—groups.

Let me describe some of the accomplishments from the past year. In 2003-4, we have:

--Provided \$14 million in targeted funds to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to further expand the use of resettlement and to significantly increase the volume of UNHCR referrals to the U.S. program;

--Developed and expanded a mechanism that allows NGOs involved in overseas refugee assistance to identify and refer deserving cases. Two regional workshops have been held in Nairobi and Accra and we are planning a similar effort in East Asia later in the year; --Taken the lead in developing resettlement programs for numerous groups such as Meskhetian Turks in Russia, Liberians all over West Africa, Vietnamese long-stayers in the Philippines, and urban Burmese and Hmong in Thailand;

--Deployed "Targeted Response Teams" comprised of government, international organization and NGO resettlement experts to assist with a range of admissions activities including pipeline development, registration or other processing, as needed; and,

--Commissioned a recently concluded study of the admissions program by world-renowned expert on U.S. immigration policy David Martin. We are evaluating the study and will soon provide it to the public.

While the per capita cost of each refugee admitted has increased significantly since 9/11 due to escalating security, transportation, medical and staffing costs, the Administration remains committed to ensuring U.S. leadership in this important humanitarian endeavor.

FY 2003/2004 Admissions Statistics

Region	FY 2003 Regional Ceiling	FY 2004 Regional Ceiling	Total Arrivals in FY 2003 (as of 8/31/03)	Total Arrivals in FY 2004 (as of 8/31/04)
Africa	20,000	25,000	7,737	24,373
East Asia	4,000	6,500	1,567	3,590
Europe & Central Asia	16,500	13,000	9,881	8,452
Latin America & Caribbean	2,500	3,500	321	2,686
Near East & South Asia	7,000	2,000	3,764	2,477
TOTAL	50,000	*50,000	23,270	41,578

***President Bush has authorized the admission of up to 70,000 refugees if additional deserving cases can be identified and screened for admission by September 30.**