



*“For refugees, there’s a huge sense of loss because they can’t return home. Once they work through their grief, you see them become extremely excited about all that America has to offer. It’s been fascinating to see that transformation take place, to see refugees become empowered and to feel that they have a place here.”*

Kaying Hang  
Senior Program Officer  
Otto Bremer Foundation



## Refugees and Asylees

### Escaping persecution is only half the battle

Once here, refugees and asylees often face a tough adjustment, having fled war, persecution, or other atrocities. As a Hmong therapist in Minnesota describes his fellow refugees: “They come here with their bodies first. Their minds follow later and sometimes, never catch up.”

Over the past 20 years, GCIR has kept funders informed of the latest developments. GCIR has also galvanized philanthropic response to major events, including the Haitian crises in 1992 and 2010, the resettlement of Hmong refugees in 2005, and Hurricane Katrina, also in 2005.

In working with foundations, GCIR has made these recommendations:

- Support advocacy to promote the use of a human rights framework in developing humanitarian assistance and admission policies.
- Fund efforts to monitor the processing of refugee and asylum claims to ensure fair and humane treatment.
- Support communications campaigns and documentary films to promote greater public awareness and understanding.
- Strengthen the service, advocacy, and organizational capacity of organizations, particularly those led by refugees and asylees.
- Increase the quantity and quality of legal services to assist asylum applicants, especially those being detained.
- Invest in innovative integration programs that help refugee and asylee families to succeed in school and the workforce.

*“Refugees usually receive government support for about three months. But we know that it takes longer than three months for people to resettle, to learn the language, to get their kids adjusted to the school system, and to get a job. If a refugee mother could take more time to understand the language and the system, she would be able to guide her kids much better. There’s a great payoff.”*

Jocelyn Ancheta  
Program Officer, Blue Cross Blue and Shield of Minnesota Foundation



### Otto Bremer Foundation

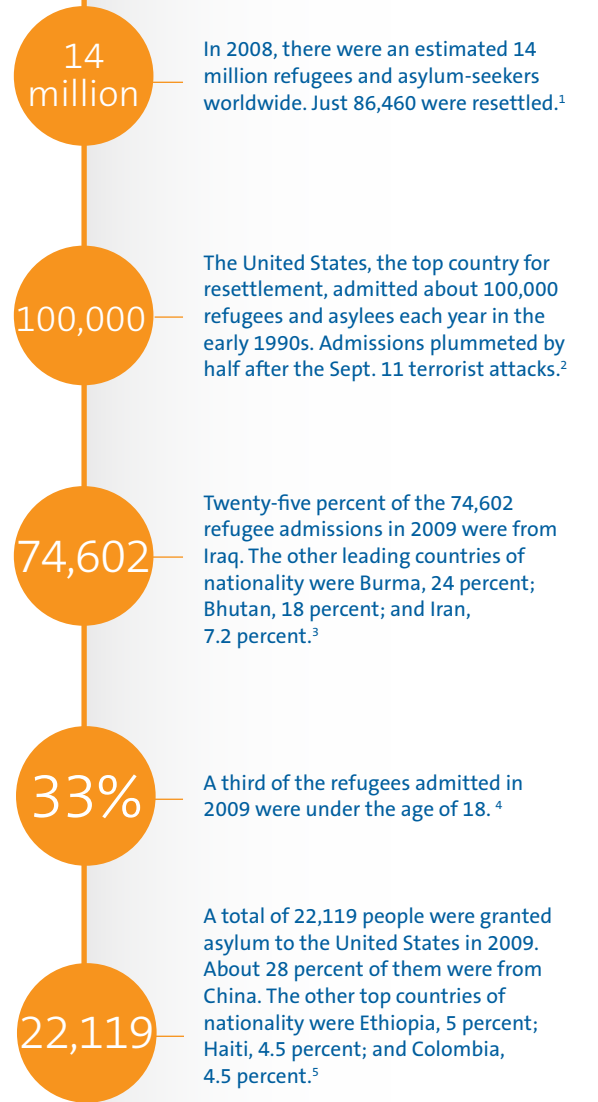
For the Otto Bremer Foundation in St. Paul, helping refugees become engaged members of society is as much about building organizational capacity as funding services. To ensure the long-term viability of mutual-aid associations, the Foundation supports governance development, strategic planning, and advocacy training.

The Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota, for example, worked with consultants to identify staffing needs, develop a fundraising strategy, and bring on new board members. After creating a new multi-year plan that includes a focus on teenagers, it launched a mentoring initiative for youths in the juvenile justice system.

Still, it’s not enough for refugees to be served by other refugees. To ensure that larger nonprofits include refugees in their programs, the Foundation supports cultural competency training and partnerships. One initiative paired Lifeworks, a job training and placement agency, with two organizations founded and led by Hmong refugees. Lifeworks provided an already functioning program; the Hmong groups offered the cultural expertise. Both were able to expand their outreach efficiently and effectively.

With investments from the Otto Bremer Foundation, refugee communities don’t have to start all over again, as they did in coming here. Their new challenges become growth opportunities.

### FAST FACTS



<sup>1</sup> U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, World Refugee Survey, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Homeland Security, Annual Flow Report on Refugees and Asylees, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.