



## **IRHRI October 2021 Report**

November 8, 2021

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## **Meeting with the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), U.S. Department of State**

November 5, 2021 (scheduled in October 2021)

### Meeting Attendees:

- Sumitra Siram, Office of Refugee Admissions, East Africa
- Justin Lewis and Ashley Solle, Lobbyit

### **Introductions**

- Lobbyit provided an overview of IRHRI as an organization, the services it provides to domestic refugee populations in the Spokane, WA area, its work with refugee populations in East Africa (particularly Uganda), and the organizations it partners with at home and abroad.
  - Lobbyit also let Sumitra know about IRHRI's upcoming expansion activities in West Virginia and documentary in the Ugandan refugee camps.
- Sumitra provided an overview of her specific role at the Office of Refugee Admissions. She helps admit refugees into the U.S. who are referred by a U.S. Embassy or specially trained NGO in East Africa.

### **PRM Refugee Admission Process**

- Sumitra provided a breakdown of the refugee resettlement process for the U.S. Government. PRM receives direct funds from Congress each fiscal year to carry out refugee admission and resettlement activities.
- There are 9 main NGOs that PRM contracts with as "resettlement agencies" to assist with the resettlement process overseas and in the U.S. These resettlement agencies work with Resettlement Support Centers (RSC) to review biographic information of potential refugee applicants for admission. Some of these resettlement agency contractors are partners with IRHRI.
  - A full list of resettlement agencies and other main US resettlement partners can be found [here](#).
- Sumitra's office handles all programs/funding for resettled refugees for the first 90 days after their arrival in the U.S. After that, the process is turned over to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).

### **Funding and Partnership Opportunities from PRM**

- The main funding resource available for NGOs to partner with PRM on the resettlement process are through their annual Request for Proposals (RFP). The RFP for Fiscal Year 2022 will likely be posted early next year.
  - Every 3 years, PRM issues an RFP for organizations to run the RSCs.



- **Sumitra's suggestion: because IRHRI is still a smaller NGO in the refugee resettlement/assistance space, the requirements for IRHRI to receive funding directly from State might be too onerous. Instead, Sumitra suggested that IRHRI work as a "subcontractor" with the 9 main resettlement agency NGOs as IRHRI continues to build up its resources and capabilities. Then down the line, IRHRI might be in a good position to apply for and receive funding directly from PRM as a resettlement agency.**

### **Challenges with Refugee Resettlement Process**

- Sumitra noted that during the Trump Administration, significant cuts were made to PRM that reduced their capacity to run the refugee admissions/resettlement process. COVID also took a toll on the process – the U.S. only admitted 15,000 refugees in 2020 from 85,000 before the Trump era. PRM is just now starting to rebuild these capacities, especially when it comes to admitting refugees from Africa.
  - The low vaccination rate for COVID in Africa continues to hinder refugee admissions.
  - They are now pushing the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to increase the number of interviews they're conducting for potential refugee admissions.
- On Afghan refugees: Sumitra estimated that there are at least 40 in Uganda right now, and a smaller group in Rwanda. Afghans who have come to the U.S. since August are "parolees", not refugees officially, which means the resettlement benefits they can receive are different/lesser.
  - For the Afghans in Uganda right now, the White House is still debating whether they can be admitted to the United States as refugees. The United Kingdom or Canada might be other destinations for them as well. For now, it's unclear how long they will remain in Uganda.
- The biggest challenge facing the resettlement of about 60,000 Afghan refugees/parolees is domestic capacity for housing and other infrastructure. Most Afghan arrivals want to be resettled where other Afghans already live (like Northern Virginia and Sacramento, CA). But because housing and other resources are stretched thin, PRM needs to start resettling in other parts of the country.
  - The next "highly impacted" areas to avoid resettlement are Washington State and Texas. West Virginia might be one destination with more housing availability for newly arrived Afghans.

### **Next Steps for IRHRI**

We have a few pathways forward for further engagement with the U.S. Government and Congress in our future monthly meetings. Please let us know in writing which you'd like to pursue for the upcoming monthly meetings.

- 1) Sumitra can connect us with PRM's Uganda Program Officer to talk more about the activities IRHRI is specifically doing in Uganda, and she might be able to connect IRHRI with other partners for resources there.



- 2) We can liaise with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. IRHRI should reach out to their Uganda office directly, but as a courtesy, PRM can touch base with them as well.
- 3) For local refugee resettlement partners and resources from the U.S. Government: we might want to look at the [HHS ORR](#), which has programs in every state except Wyoming. ORR works through the states and other NGOs to provide longer-term cash and medical assistance, as well as language, employment, and social services. This is probably the best point of contact for the work IRHRI provides domestically.
- 4) On the Congressional advocacy side: it seems that IRHRI's voice can be best served as an advocate for Congress to provide additional funds to the refugee resettlement and humanitarian assistance programs that PRM manages. Sumitra told us that Congress usually provides higher funds than the White House request, but starting in January, it could be useful to get IRHRI involved in the appropriations process.

Should you have any questions about the contents of this monthly report, feel free to contact me at [jlewis@lobbyit.com](mailto:jlewis@lobbyit.com).

Regards,

Justin Lewis  
Government Relations Director  
Lobbyit.com, LLC