

Refugees and Immigrants and Fair Housing

By

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Fair Housing

What is Fair Housing? The Fair Housing Act is a landmark law in the U.S. enacted in 1968. According to [HUD](#), fair housing means the right to choose your housing free from unlawful discrimination. Fair Housing seeks to ensure that no one is discriminated against in housing transactions on the basis of a person's protected classes such as race, color, national origin, religion, sex (gender), disability, or familial status (children in the family).

Refugees and Immigrants

A refugee and immigrant are two different statuses. According to the [International Rescue Committee](#), a refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her home country, unlike an immigrant, who is someone who chooses to resettle to another country. The number of immigrants and refugees in the U.S. is huge. [The American Immigration Council](#) states that one in seven U.S. residents is an immigrant, which makes up 14 percent of the national population. For instance, in Washington State, 13.7% of the state's population is immigrants and over 17 percent of self-employed business owners in Washington State are immigrants. According to the [Migration Policy Information](#), the U.S. has been accepting more refugees annually than any other country in the world. However, there has been a reduction in the number of refugees arriving in the U.S., for instance, in 2018, 22,491 refugees arrived in the U.S., a 58% decrease from the 53,716 people admitted in 2017.

Refugees and immigrants, who come to the U.S., are from different cultural backgrounds where housing styles are different from housing styles in the U.S. Many refugees and immigrants owned their own homes. Some lived in large houses with big fences while others lived in very small houses. Upon arrival into the U.S., housing must be paid for and some immigrants and refugees are settled in areas with long, cold winters, where they experience cultural shock. Challenges refugees and immigrants face upon arrival into the U.S. include family size (large households), and in some cultures, boys and girls require separate bedrooms; both situations require larger, more costly, and less available dwelling units. Another housing difficulty immigrants and refugees face is Limited English Proficiency (LEP). As everything is written in English, many face difficulties negotiating the contracts, reading leases, and/or understanding notices. Refugees and immigrants may also face fair housing issues.

National Origin Discrimination

The Fair Housing Act protects people from discrimination when they are renting or buying a home. Therefore, refugees and immigrants are protected from discrimination based on their ancestry or birthplace (their national origin) in housing-related transactions. They are protected from denial of housing transactions, different treatment, and being harassed as well.

Housing providers may require some documentation to verify if potential renter / buyers meet their eligibility criteria, requesting social security numbers, rental references, and credit history. However, some refugees, immigrants, as well as international students may not have social security numbers or rental and credit history in the U.S. Thus, housing providers should make

sure their policies do NOT conflict with the fair housing laws. For instance, best practice screening and application policies should provide options for alternative identification documents such as passports, visas, or work cards. [See Fair Housing in Washington State: 100 FAQs, App. B.](#)

Familial Status

All families who have children, including refugee and immigrant households with children, are protected by the Fair Housing Act against familial status discrimination. Single-parent households and same-sex couples with children are protected as well. An issue that may appear under familial status is when a housing provider tells the family that no unit is available even though a unit is in fact available. It is also illegal to only make specific floor, units or buildings available for families with children, by requiring families with children to rent first-floor apartments, or steering families with children to some particular buildings or neighborhoods. Further, it is illegal to evict families because a new child joins the family through birth, adoption, or custody. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Religious Protection

Under the Fair Housing Act, it is illegal for housing providers to treat renters or homebuyers differently because of their religion, which may be demonstrated by wearing religious clothing or religion practices. Many refugees and immigrants who come to the U.S. are from countries where religion is very important. For example, most refugees and immigrants who come from the Middle Eastern countries are Muslims.

Possible fair housing violations under religion for example include a housing provider refusing to rent to a woman who wears a hijab or a man who wears a turban, steering people to a neighborhood to rent where there is a mosque, prohibiting the use of a community room for one type of religious gathering while other religious gatherings are allowed, or tenants calling Muslims terrorists or telling them they are not welcome and go back to your country, etc. [Click here](#) for more information from HUD about religion protections in housing.

Get Fair Housing Help

Every person in the United States is protected by the Fair Housing Act to have to right to live, rent, buy, or obtain a dwelling regardless of his/her protected classes if he or she is able to meet the financial and other eligibility requirements. If a housing-provider refuses to rent or sell to you because of your race, color, national origin, religion, sex (gender), disability, familial status (children in the family), you should contact your local fair housing agency to get help. Fair housing agencies do not require a person's immigration or refugee status when people file fair housing complaints and their services are free.

For Fair Housing help in Eastern and Central Washington:



**NORTHWEST FAIR
HOUSING ALLIANCE**

"Working to Ensure Equal Housing Opportunity for All"

509-325-2665 / 800-200-FAIR (3247)

execdir@nwfairhouse.org

We have downloadable fair housing trifold brochures in English, Spanish, Arabic, Marshallese, French, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Laotian, Swahili, & Vietnamese:

[Library | NWFHA \(nwfairhouse.org\)](#)

Information provided by Northwest Fair Housing Alliance (NWFHA) is not intended as a substitute for legal advice.
For more information about NWFHA visit our website at www.nwfairhouse.org.

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