

REFUGEE SUNDAY RESOURCE LIBRARY

Refugee Fact Sheet

Q. How does someone gain refugee status?

Refugee resettlement in the US is a federal program. Each year in October, the president, in consultation with Congress, sets the number of refugees to be admitted for U.S. resettlement. Currently, under the Obama administration, that number is 70,000 refugees. In 2016, the number will be 85,000, with at least 10,000 of those refugees likely to be from Syria. In past years, during the Reagan years, for example, our refugee numbers were somewhat higher at 120,000. Still, in any given year, the number the U.S. resettles is relatively small—roughly one-half of one percent of the world's refugees, which is estimated today at over 60 million*. (UNHCR)

Q. How does the resettlement process work in the U.S.?

Nationally, there are 9 voluntary organizations that coordinate refugee resettlement, including Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), and nearly 200 social service organizations across the country that actually do the work of helping resettle refugees in local communities. Congregations also have played a role in the resettlement process, often helping to anchor the families who come here.

Refugees often resettle in places where they can be near their families and where there are jobs, good schools and safe neighborhoods—not unlike the reasons why most of us live where we do. The best scenario is to place refugees where they can be successful. The refugee state coordinators (at the state level) agree to the number of arrivals. Resettlement organizations must have the capacity to manage the process as well.

Q. What is the difference between a refugee and immigrant?

Refugees move to a new country because they have nowhere else to go. They are fleeing persecution and fear for their lives. They must prove that they have been persecuted or have a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, political affiliation, and other factors. Immigrants relocate to a new country because they want to, and have approval, from the government that is receiving them. They are people who can return to their countries without fear.

Q. How do refugees support themselves?

They find jobs. Refugees have been helpful to our economy in recent years because they have taken jobs in industries that have had employee shortages. And, these industries were good placements for refugees because they required few English or technical skills.

Q. Do refugees come here for a certain time limit?

Refugees and immigrants are here permanently. They can apply for permanent residency after a year and apply for citizenship after five years.

Q. Can refugees apply for public assistance?

Refugees can apply for public benefits if they are eligible, just like other residents. Employment counselors help refugees find work so that they can support themselves. Many refugees often find work in manufacturing or other industries very quickly, making them ineligible for public assistance.



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Q. Do refugees receive cultural orientation and information about customs and U.S. laws?

Yes. Refugees receive orientation before they come. Refugee resettlement agencies review this information again when they arrive.

Q: Aren't refugees more likely to be criminals?

Based on a recent study conducted by the American Immigration Council, immigrants are less likely to commit serious crimes or be behind bars than the native-born population, and high rates of immigration are associated with lower rates of violent crime and property crime. This holds true for both legal immigrants and the unauthorized, regardless of their country of origin or level of education. In other words, the overwhelming majority of immigrants are not "criminals" by any commonly accepted definition of the term. For this reason, harsh immigration policies are not effective in fighting crime.

Q. What about refugees taking jobs and draining local economies?

Refugees are more likely to be entrepreneurial and enjoy higher rates of successful business ventures compared to natives. At the local level, refugees provide increased demand for goods and services through their new purchasing power and can be particularly revitalizing in communities that otherwise have a declining population. It is also worth noting that research has shown annual earnings growth among refugees living in the U.S. has outpaced pay increases among economic immigrants, or individuals who haven't been displaced by disaster, persecution or violence.

Q. Why should we allow refugees to come here?

We are a nation of immigrants and refugees. As people of faith, we are called to "welcome the stranger". Helping refugees who have fled their homes and are displaced in refugee camps with little or no food, health care, shelter or protection is the right thing to do. We hope that someone would do the same for us if we were in their shoes.

While there is a short-term cost, there is a long-term economic gain that refugees bring. The majority of refugees open businesses, fill important jobs, become teachers, CEOs, and public officials. The overwhelming majority of refugees and asylum seekers in the U.S. today are law-abiding, hard-working individuals and families who make valuable contributions to their communities by starting businesses, paying taxes, and by sharing their unique cultural gifts with America. Much of our continued success as a nation will rest on our ability to embrace those who come here seeking protection and better opportunities for themselves and their families. The U.S. is a global leader in programs that support immigration, refugee resettlement and asylee protection. Let us all continue to join forces in working to help improve these programs and maintain their integrity.

*Figure includes refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced persons worldwide

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