



Refugee Facts and Figures

World refugees in 2019 - 25.4 million. The U.S. resettles less than 1/2 of 1% of them. The President, in consultation with Congress, determines the number. This year (Oct. 1, 2019-Sept. 30, 2020), that number is 18,000.

A refugee is someone who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country. (1951 Refugee Convention)

Refugees go through an intensive government screening and security clearance process and requests go out to 9 national voluntary organizations to determine where they will go. One of those is LIRS - Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service – a ministry of our church that has been doing this work since resettling displaced persons from Europe after World War II.

LIRS and their 8 colleague organizations determine where to send refugees next based on consultation with their affiliates about where refugees are most likely to successfully integrate. The State of MN also has a Department of Human Services Resettlement Program Office that provides input on the number of refugee arrivals in Minnesota.

Largest states for resettlement in 2019:

1. Texas: 2,500
2. Washington: 1,900
3. New York: 1,800
4. California: 1,800
5. Kentucky: 1,400

In fiscal year 2019 (October 1, 2018-September 30, 2019), Minnesota ranked 13th with 848 refugee arrivals but is the highest per capita in the country, because Minnesota has always had the reputation as a very welcoming state. Minnesota is also the No. 1 state in the nation for “secondary migration” – refugees moving to Minnesota after their initial resettlement elsewhere, because Minnesota is such a welcoming state.

Minnesota is home to 5 resettlement organizations - LSS, Catholic Charities of Winona, the MN Council of Churches, the International Institute, and Arrive Ministries. Minnesota is also home to the American Refugee Committee, the Center for Victims of Torture, and one of the most sophisticated health systems specializing in refugee health.

This year, refugees that we will help to resettle in the Twin Cities will be coming from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burma/Myanmar (Karen, Karenni), Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Russia, Somali, Sudan and the Ukraine. Through our St Cloud office, we will be resettling refugees from Somalia, Burma/Myanmar (Karen), Ethiopia, Iraq and Kenya.

Refugees receive a one-time grant of \$1,175. They also receive a loan to pay for their travel to the U.S. which they are required to pay back.

LSS of MN receives \$1,000 per arrival, which we supplement with other revenue to cover our expenses. The LSS of MN budget is \$158 million in total revenue in 2020, with about half of 1% coming from Refugee Resettlement.

We are required to help new refugees find employment as soon as possible. Some refugees receive government supported social services, just as many other Minnesotans do. Getting and keeping employment when one is new and English is a new language is hard. All immigrant groups have gone through this sort of adjustment until they have gotten a foothold in our country. American public policy since World War II has supported resettling refugees from conflict areas and providing tax-paid social services to help them get integrated into American communities.

As consumers, immigrants in Minnesota have an estimated \$659 billion in lifetime earnings and annual purchasing power of \$5 billion. Immigrants pay an estimated \$793 million in state and local taxes annually.

The Minnesota Chamber of Commerce has a compelling presentation which explains that we need immigrants to keep our state's economy strong and competitive in the decades ahead.

Over the past decade, some Minnesota communities have experienced a significant influx of refugees into their communities. Today's refugee population, just as today's overall American population, is much more mobile than in earlier generations. Once refugees are resettled wherever they are first sent in the U.S., they are as free to move again as any other American.

Refugees tend to gather in communities where they have relatives, of course, and where there are jobs and other refugees who share their language and culture. This can be a really good development as concentrated neighborhoods of immigrants and refugees have always helped each other integrate and move forward in America (as in Chinatown, Little Italy, etc.).

A large concentration of refugees moving into one community over a few years can be a significant adjustment for that community. If jobs are available – which is usually the case where refugees gather – they can be a big boost for local businesses and local economies.

While school systems may need to make major adjustments, they also benefit from increased state aid with the influx of new students. State aid to public schools in Minnesota is boosted for students who require English as a Second Language support.

Case Study – St. Cloud, MN

The city of St. Cloud, with a population of 68,043 by the latest estimate, has a foreign-born population of 6,865 or 10% of the total population, an increase of 4,596 since the 2000 Census. In the Tri-County area, including Stearns, Benton and Wright counties, the population is estimated to be 295,837, with 13,680 residents that are foreign-born, or 4.6% of the total population.

When the Iraq War ended and the State of Minnesota was contemplating opening its doors to “free cases” – refugees not reuniting with family – Lutheran Social Service of MN held community stakeholder meetings in St. Cloud and were encouraged by stakeholders, especially the schools and English as a Second Language providers, to accept Iraqi refugees for resettlement in St. Cloud.

After a handful of Iraqi refugees were resettled in St. Cloud, they virtually all “secondarily migrated” to the Detroit area which hosts the largest group of Iraqi refugees just as Minnesota has hosted the largest group of Hmong, Somali, and Karen refugees from Burma and North Dakota has hosted many Kurdish refugees.

With an established office in St. Cloud, we began to receive family reunification cases for the growing Somali population there. LSS of Minnesota is the only MN refugee organization with an office in St. Cloud. We have settled 1,550 refugees in St. Cloud since 2009 – all of them reuniting with family members who already lived in St. Cloud.

We are in conversation with community leaders in St. Cloud about how we can provide additional support for the integration of refugees into the community.

What is Different About this Wave of Refugees vs. the Vietnam-Era Refugees:

1. Sheer numbers - largest migration since World War II
2. No congregational model in Minnesota since Vietnam
3. Muslim faith
4. Secondary migration – though Hmong moved too
5. Social media
6. Rural and smaller town resettlements vs. urban
7. Lower local birth rates calling for more refugees/immigrants to make the economy work

Additional Resources

“My Neighbor is Muslim” is a 7-week small group study intended to open doors, minds, and hearts and dispel stereotypes and myths about Muslim neighbors.

<http://www.lssmn.org/refugeeservices/study/>