

REFUGEES LIVING IN ARIZONA

This fact sheet offers a profile of likely refugees living in Arizona and describes their integration and contributions to the state over time, relying on data from the US Census Bureau's 2017 1-Year American Community Survey (ACS).¹ All refugees covered by this fact sheet were admitted to the United States between 1987 and 2017.² By 2017, more than half were naturalized citizens and most of the remainder had adjusted to legal permanent resident status. Like all refugees in the United States, refugees in Arizona arrived penniless but have integrated into their local communities over time.

- As of 2017, at least 31,300 refugees lived in Arizona. Eighty-five percent of these resided in the Phoenix Metropolitan Statistical Area, 12 percent in the Tucson metro, and the remaining 3 percent in the rest of the state.
- The refugees' top five countries of origin are Iraq (10,400), Vietnam (4,800), Bosnia (3,000), Burma (2,300), and Somalia (1,400). Some 53 percent are female, and 47 percent are male. About 82 percent are between 18 and 64 years of age, 10 percent are under 18 years old, and 9 percent are 65 years old or older.³
- Arizona has both recently-arrived and long-established refugee communities. About 19 percent of refugees in Arizona have resided in the United States for less than 5 years, 29 percent for 5 to 9 years, 10 percent for 10 to 14 years, 24 percent for 15 to 24 years, and 18 percent for 25 years or more. The

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majority of those who have resided in the United States for less than 5 years are from Iraq.

- Many refugees have put down deep roots in Arizona. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of refugees in Arizona have become US citizens, and 35 percent are non-citizens. Thirty-three percent are married to US citizens. Refugees have 13,400 US-born citizen children. Forty-one percent live in mortgaged homes, and 17 percent reside in homes owned 'free and clear.'

¹ This factsheet is based on a sample of 1.7 million likely refugees of the 2.3 million refugees admitted to the United States between 1987 and 2017, as recorded by the Department of Homeland Security. CMS identified likely refugees using the 2017 1-year American Community Survey (ACS). This large sample permits CMS to estimate the size and characteristics of likely refugees in key states. To do so, it compiled DHS statistics on refugee arrivals by country of birth and year of entry. It then used arrival data by birth country and year to select refugees randomly from corresponding cells in the 2017 ACS data. For more information see Kerwin, Donald. 2018. "The US Refugee Resettlement Program—A Return to First Principles: How Refugees Help to Define, Strengthen, and Revitalize the United States." New York: Center for Migration Studies. <https://cmsny.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/CCUSA-CRS-USCCB-US-Refugee-Resettlement-Report.pdf>

² The term "refugee" used here refers to status at entry.

³ Percentages are rounded and might not sum to 100.

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- High rates of refugees have learned English: 41 percent of those age 5 and over speak English very well or only English, 30 percent speak English well, 21 percent speak a little English, and 8 percent speak no English.
- Arizona’s refugees possess a variety of educational backgrounds: 18 percent of those aged 18 or older have a bachelor’s degree or higher; 29 percent have attended college; 30 percent have a high school education or its equivalent; and 24 percent have less than a high school education.⁴ These education levels will rise over time since 20 percent of refugees aged 3 or over are enrolled in school.
- Refugees in Arizona quickly become economically self-sufficient. They also experience substantial gains in income as they spend more time in the United States. In 2017, households with at least one refugee had median incomes of \$33,000, as compared to \$56,000 for the Arizona population as a whole. However, households with refugees who have been in the United States for 10 years or more had a median income of \$40,000.
- The median personal income of refugees in Arizona was \$15,000 in 2017, as compared to \$24,000 for the Arizona population as a whole. However, the median personal income of

The vast majority of Arizona-based refugees have some English skills, including 41% over the age of 5 speaking English as their primary language or speaking English very well.

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refugees who have resided in the United States for 10 years or more *exceeds* the state median personal income at \$26,300.

- About 94 percent of refugees in the labor force are employed. Refugees living in Arizona work in a variety of industries. They are vital to the state’s food, beauty, and transportation industries. The top 10 industries employing refugees, and refugees’ top 10 occupations, are listed below

in Tables A and B, respectively. Some 32 percent of refugees also work in skilled occupations, including 1,500 in management, business, and financial occupations, and nearly 1,000 health care practitioners. Some 7.7 percent of those in the labor force are self-employed and, thus, employ others.

⁴ Percentages are rounded and might not sum to 100.

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Table A. Top 10 Industries Employing Refugees	
Industry	Number
Elementary and secondary schools	1,100
Restaurants and other food services	1,100
Nail salons and other personal care services	1,100
Services to buildings and dwellings	900
Individual and family social services	800
Department stores and discount stores	800
Truck transportation	600
Warehousing and storage	600
Taxi and limousine service	600
Traveler accommodation	600

Table B. Top 10 Occupations of Refugees in Arizona	
Occupation	Number
Personal appearance workers	1,100
Personal care aides	1,100
Security guards and gaming surveillance officers	800
Janitors and building cleaners	700
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	600
Driver/sales workers and truck drivers	600
Customer service representatives	600
Assemblers and fabricators	600
Taxi drivers and chauffeurs	600
Cashiers	Z*

*Z refers to numbers below 500.

Source: Center for Migration Studies of New York 2019. Unpublished estimates based on 2017 1-Year American Community Survey data and Department of Homeland Security data on refugee admissions, 1987-2017.