

REFUGEES LIVING IN KENTUCKY

This fact sheet offers a profile of likely refugees living in Kentucky 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 Kentucky arrived penniless but have integrated into their local communities over time.

- As of 2017, at least 17,700 refugees lived in Kentucky. Forty-two percent of these resided in the Louisville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), 17 percent in Fayette County, 13 percent in Warren County, 7 percent in Boone County, 4 percent in Kenton County, and the remaining 17 percent in the rest of the state.
- The refugees' top five countries of origin are the Democratic Republic of Congo (4,500), Bosnia (2,300), Bhutan (2,300), Burma (1,500), and Ukraine (1,100). Some 54 percent are female, and 46 percent are male. About 87 percent are between 18 and 64 years of age, 10 percent are under 18 years old, and 4 percent are 65 years old or older.³
- Kentucky has both recently-arrived and long-established refugee communities. About 34 percent of refugees in Kentucky have resided in the United States for less than 5 years, 20 percent for 5 to 9 years, 13 percent for 10 to 14 years, 25 percent for 15 to 24 years, and 8 percent for 25 years or more.

At least 17,700 refugees lived in Kentucky as of 2017, with most arriving from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bosnia, Bhutan, Burma, and Ukraine.

Just under half (43%) of refugees in Kentucky have become US citizens, and Kentucky-based refugees have 8,000 US-born citizen children.

- Many refugees have put down deep roots in Kentucky. Just under half (43 percent) of refugees in Kentucky have become US citizens, and 57 percent are non-citizens. Twenty-two percent are married to US citizens. Refugees have 8,000 US-born citizen children. Thirty-one percent live in mortgaged homes.

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.

REFUGEE COUNCIL USA

- High rates of refugees have learned English: 30 percent of those age 5 and over speak English very well or only English, 29 percent speak English well, 33 percent speak a little English, and 7 percent speak no English.⁴
- More than two-thirds of Kentucky's refugees aged 18 or older have at least a high school education or its equivalent. Specifically, 10 percent of those aged 18 or older have a bachelor's degree or higher; 18 percent have attended college; 40 percent have a high school education or its equivalent; and 33 percent have less than a high school education.⁵ These education levels will rise over time since 16 percent of refugees aged 3 or over are enrolled in school.
- In 2017, households with at least one refugee had median incomes of \$30,000, as compared to \$47,200 for the Kentucky population as a whole. The median personal income of refugees in Kentucky was \$15,000 in 2017, as compared to \$21,500 for the Kentucky population as a whole.

The majority of Kentucky-based refugees have some English skills, including 30% over the age of 5 speaking English as their primary language or speaking English very well.

About 94% of refugees in Kentucky in the labor force are employed. They are vital parts of the e-commerce, food, and transportation industries.

- About 94 percent of refugees in the labor force are employed. Refugees living in Kentucky work in a variety of industries. They are vital to the state's e-commerce, food, and transportation industries. The top 10 industries employing refugees, and refugees' top 10 occupations, are listed below in Tables A and B, respectively. Some 17 percent of refugees also work in skilled occupations, including some 500 health care practitioners. Some 9.7 percent of those in the labor force are self-employed and, thus, employ others.

⁴ Percentages are rounded and might not sum to 100.

⁵ Percentages are rounded and might not sum to 100.

REFUGEE COUNCIL USA

Table A. Top 10 Industries Employing Refugees	
Industry	Number
Electronic auctions, e-commerce	1,000
Motor vehicles and motor vehicle equipment manufacturing	800
Restaurants and other food services	800
Animal slaughtering and processing	700
Nail salons and other personal care services	700
Department stores and discount stores	600
Taxi and limousine service	500
Truck transportation	500
Hospitals	500
Electronic / online shopping	Z*

Table B. Top 10 Occupations of Refugees in Kentucky	
Occupation	Number
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers	1,100
Packers and packagers	800
Stock clerks and order fillers	800
Driver/sales workers and truck drivers	700
Personal appearance workers	700
Bookbinders, printing machine operators, and job printers	700
Assemblers and fabricators	500
Taxi drivers and chauffeurs	500
Butchers and other meat, poultry, and fish processing workers	500
Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks	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.