

Ways Refugees Strengthen Our Economy and Communities

During the COVID-19 crisis, many [refugees are working on the frontlines and in essential jobs](#).

- There are approximately [176,000 refugee workers in the US healthcare sector](#) — 70.6 percent — or about 124,200 — are women. Female refugees are present at all levels of the healthcare workforce, including as health aides, nurses, physicians and surgeons, maids and housekeeping cleaners, dental assistants and dentists, and clinical laboratory technologists and technicians.
- Refugee workers are also vital to ensuring that America's food supply chain functions with [175,000 working in the food supply chain](#). More than 46,000 refugee workers work in food processing, including more than 9,300 butchers and meat processing workers. More than 31,000 work in grocery stores and supermarkets, including 2,400 shelf stockers and 2,100 freight and stock movers. More than 77,500 refugee workers work in restaurants and food service establishments, including 14,000 cooks.

Refugees have incredible purchase and spending power that is a boon to local economies — and fill critical gaps in the labor market.

- “Refugees and asylees not only contribute to the economic health of their new country but increase their economic contributions considerably over time.” - David Bier, [Cato Institute](#)
- A [report](#) on refugee economic impacts in Southeast Michigan estimates the total annual positive economic impact to include between \$229.6 million and \$295.3 million in new consumer spending, along with the creation of between 1,798 and 2,311 new jobs in 2016 alone.
- “Refugees coming to our communities and refugees that have backgrounds in agriculture, cattle herding or other skills important to the dairy industry were a huge help in filling shortages. On average, our dairymen are short at least one to two positions on their dairy that they can't get filled because labor is so tight so refugees were playing a critical role in helping to fill those gaps.” - Rick Naerebout, the CEO of the [Idaho Dairymen's Association](#)
- [Home ownership rates](#) among refugees who have lived in the US for more than 10 years are comparable to US-born families and increases total housing values by millions of dollars.

Refugees have high rates of entrepreneurship, creating jobs and boosting local economies.

- Entrepreneurship among refugees is higher than among US born populations. Thirteen percent of refugees were [entrepreneurs](#) in 2015, compared to just 9% of the US-born population. In 2015 alone, 181,000 refugee entrepreneurs brought in \$4.6 billion in business income.
- 40% of all Fortune 500 companies were [founded](#) by refugees, immigrants or their children.
- In [Columbus, OH](#), refugees support an estimated 21,273 jobs and contribute \$1.6 billion to their local economy every year.
- In [Lancaster, PA](#) refugees helped create or preserve 1,062 local manufacturing jobs that would have vanished or moved elsewhere.
- In [Cleveland, OH](#) refugee businesses supported 175 jobs and \$12 million in area spending in 2012 alone.
- In [Buffalo, NY](#) refugee businesses, such as restaurants and shops, have redeveloped streets and revitalized neighborhoods because of refugees starting businesses and creating destinations to explore cuisines.

Refugees are taxpayers and contribute back much more to our economy than they receive in initial benefits.

- A [report](#) by the Department of Health and Human Services released in July of 2017 shows that refugees have brought in a net \$63 billion in revenue over the past decade. The report also concluded that between 2005-2014, refugees contributed a total \$269.1 billion to the US economy (taxes, payroll and other sources), far surpassing the \$206.1 billion spent on them.
- Refugees [pay](#) an average \$21,000 more in taxes than they receive in benefits over their first 20 years in the United States. Refugees contributed [\\$21 billion](#) in taxes in 2015 alone.
- A report in [Tennessee](#) found that refugees contribute more than they consume in benefits, paying almost twice as much in tax revenues — including for schooling and health care — in the past two decades alone.

Success Stories of Refugee Integration

Words from Mayors

- Utica, NY Mayor Robert Palmieri: “We’ve had a rebirth into some of our older neighborhoods that were starting to decay. Refugees have come in here and revitalized them and made them a proud neighborhood once again.”
- Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan: “When these families moved in, these people were not greeted with anger and protest. They were greeted with smiles and hugs.”

A Family of Entrepreneurs

- Haroon Mokhtarzada fled the Russian invasion of Afghanistan as a kid, and he and his family were resettled as refugees in the United States. Though his family was well off in Afghanistan, they had to find new means of income once they relocated. His parents began a passport procurement firm in their basement which allowed the family to live comfortably. Shaped by his parents’ entrepreneurial mindset, Haroon and his brothers started *Webs* — the first major company that allowed users to easily design their own websites for free using templates without intrusive ads and popups. *Webs* raised \$12 million dollars in venture capital funding, and in 2011, the company was bought by *Vistaprint* for \$117.5 million.

Planting Roots in New Communities

- Dhan Subba is a farmer and refugee from Bhutan. After living in Nepal for 18 years, Dhan picked up several farming skills which he now uses to harvest vegetables. Participating in IRC’s New Roots Program, Dhan uses his talents to grow produce for his community. Vacant lots in Charlottesville have since transformed into weekend markets where Dhan meets his neighbors and interacts with the community. While Dhan still keeps his day job, he invests a lot of time and energy in his farm and community.

Living the American Dream

- Jacob Mach was one of the Lost Boys of Sudan, a group of 20,000 boys who were displaced or orphaned during the Sudanese civil war from 1983 to 2005. In 2001, the US granted Jacob refugee status, and he arrived in Clarkston, Georgia at the age of 21. Upon his arrival, he worked at the grocery store Publix, as well as working night shifts at hotels. After years of saving money, he was able to bring his wife and son from Kenya to Georgia. Since then, he has earned his bachelor’s degree from Georgia State University and has obtained American citizenship. In 2012, Jacob was recruited and trained to be an officer for the Atlanta Police Department. He passed the exam after intense training, and upon graduation, realized that his dreams have come to life.

From Refugee to Engineer

- Meqdam “Mike” Almaroof arrived in Seattle from Iraq and spent his first months searching for jobs. Through *Tatweer*, a mentorship program that pairs refugees with clients in their desired fields, Mike obtained employment at Kent — a reputable engineering company. Since then, Mike has led a project surveying 100 sidewalk ramps and drawing retrofit designs to make them accessible for handicapped individuals. His plans have since been approved and construction is set to begin!

Additional Resources

- [Contributions of Refugees](#)
- [State-by-State Refugee Profiles](#)
- New American Economy: [Refugee Workers on the Frontlines and as Essential Workers](#)
- New American Economy: [From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America” New American Economy](#)
- National Bureau of Economic Research: [The Economic and Social Outcomes of Refugees in the United States: Evidence from ACS](#)
- Urban Institute: [Bringing Evidence to the Refugee Integration Debate](#)
- International Rescue Committee: [Financial Capability for New Americans: Lessons from Early Interventions with Refugees](#)