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Settlement of Syrian Refugees in the U.S. Accelerates

After a slow start, Obama administration's annual goal of 10,000 arrivals is within reach

By

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July 13, 2016 5:30 a.m. ET

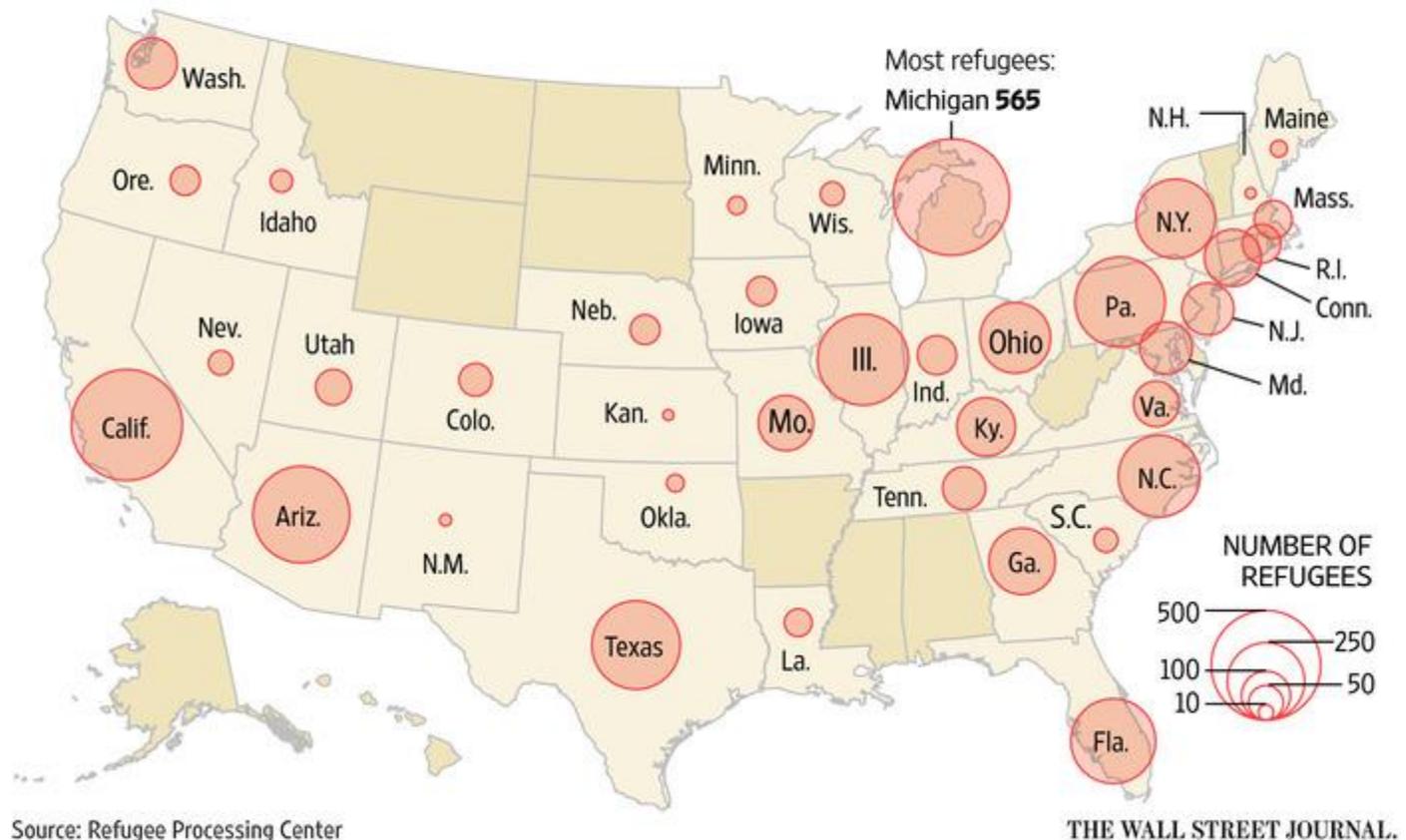
After a slow start, the influx of Syrians to the U.S. has accelerated in recent months and annual arrivals are likely to reach 10,000 by the end of September, the amount promised by the Obama administration.

Last year, [the U.S. pledged to resettle 85,000 refugees](#) from all over the world in the fiscal year that began on Oct. 1, including at least 10,000 Syrian refugees. By March 31, halfway through the fiscal year, only 1,285 Syrians had arrived, according to official data. By June 30, the Syrian number had jumped to 5,211. Overall refugee admissions had reached 49,791. Among Syrians admitted this year, 20% are adult men, 20% are adult women and 60% are children. The vast majority of the men are in a family unit, said a State Department spokesman.

The deployment of additional staff and resources in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq has enabled both the Departments of State and Homeland Security to review more applications and complete more security checks in recent months, he said. For instance, between February and April, Homeland Security officers in Amman, Jordan, interviewed about 12,000 individuals referred by the U.N. High Commission for Refugees.

Seeking Refuge

Number of Syrian refugee arrivals by state for the fiscal year ended June 30.



The U.S. resettled 1,682 Syrians in fiscal year 2015 and only 105 in 2014. So far this fiscal year, Michigan California and Illinois have been the top three recipients of Syrian refugees.

Due to security checks, it takes about two years for a refugee to be admitted to the U.S. Typically, the vetting includes several interviews of family members, together and apart, background checks, fingerprinting and iris scans, among other things.

The increase in arrivals “does not represent a curtailment, in any way, of our comprehensive and robust security screening,” said the State Department spokesman. “Syrian refugees are subject to even more scrutiny” than other refugees, he added.

But Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, which is critical of U.S. refugee-resettlement efforts, said he wasn’t confident in the vetting.

“They aren’t going to admit the next 5,000 Syrians in three months unless they are rushing through the supposedly rigid security screening,” he said.

Following the terrorist attacks in Paris and the U.S., the resettlement of Muslims, particularly from Syria, has become a contested issue at the state level and in the presidential campaign.

In November, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott called for a halt to cooperation with nonprofit agencies that are contracted by the federal government to settle refugees; [GOP governors in roughly two dozen other states](#) voiced opposition to receiving Syrians. Last month, a federal judge rejected a lawsuit filed by Texas that sought to suspend resettlement. Texas had claimed the Obama administration didn’t adequately consult with the state, as required by law, before sending refugees there. In his decision, the judge ruled that the state didn’t have authority over resettlement by the federal government. The judge also said the state had failed to present plausible evidence that Syrian refugees pose an imminent threat.

Republican presidential candidate [Donald Trump](#) has proposed a temporary ban on Muslims entering the U.S., while Democrat [Hillary Clinton](#) has called for boosting the number of Syrian refugees that the U.S. accepts. Refugee advocacy groups, which had previously criticized the slow pace of Syrian arrivals, said they were pleased with the recent progress. But they continue to call on Washington to do more.

“The Obama administration’s 10,000 goal remains an exceedingly modest one, when compared with the scale of the refugee crisis and the resources of the United States,” said Anwen Hughes, deputy legal director of New York-based Human Rights First.

The conflict in Syria, now in its sixth year, has forced millions to flee. About five million Syrians have registered or are awaiting registration with the U.N. refugee commission, the agency that leads emergency response in neighboring countries.