

Most Commonly Asked Questions (Updated August 2017)

Here are a number of questions which are frequently asked about Syrian and other refugee resettlement.

1. I have a spare bedroom. Can I host a Syrian or other refugee family?

The short answer is “no,” but there are still many ways you can help.

For the past 35 years, the US resettlement program has operated through a network of sectarian and non-sectarian resettlement agencies, which vary from city to city. These national voluntary agencies (VOLAGS) include the International Rescue Committee, World Relief, US Catholic Conference of Bishops, the US Committee for Refugees & Immigrants (USCRI), and others. Local faith-based or other affiliates contract with the US government to resettle refugees, agreeing to locate housing, make referrals for English classes, employment and other adjustment services and to recruit individual volunteers and groups to assist.

In St. Louis, the only agency, which is currently approved as a resettlement sponsor, is the International Institute of St. Louis, located on Arsenal St., in South St. Louis City. In 2016, the Institute sponsored 1,151 refugees in St. Louis. That number has dropped dramatically in recent months as the new White House Administration first cut the annual sponsorship ceiling in half to 50,000 annually and then established a 120-day ban on refugee admissions, which will not end before mid-November 2017. The negative impact of these decisions on refugees overseas and on their families in the US who were waiting to be reunited has been dramatic. Keep an eye out at our site for information about the progress of resettlement plans.

2. How many refugees are available for resettlement in the US?

Presently there are more than 60 million refugees and Internally Displaced People (IDP) in the world, resulting in the largest refugee crisis since WWII. (Note: Refugees have fled outside the borders of their home country and IDPs are displaced within their home country.) Twenty million of the total are Syrians including 4+ million residing outside the Syrian borders. Some are living in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)-operated camps in surrounding countries, namely Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. But most refugees have been residing outside the camps, living in limbo. They have had no jobs, housing or access to schools. Whatever money they had has been running out. Hundreds of thousands have been

fleeing to Europe by boat and foot in recent weeks, refugees who were living outside the camps previous to their flight to Europe.

As is the case for most refugee groups, we expect that the bulk of Syrians now living in the camps will want to return to their homes if peace can be negotiated. Others may have opportunities to remain in their temporary host country on a more permanent basis. For a small number, permanent resettlement to a “third country” including the US may be the best option.

Within the camps UNHCR has been working to identify refugees who for a variety of reasons, including medical, family structure and safety, would benefit from third country sponsorship. **UNHCR identified approximately 250,000 with immediate needs.** In 2015, the White House announced a desire to increase refugee resettlement to 85,000 in the current fiscal year and 100,000 in the following year. The 85,000 goal was met. However, the new White House Administration cut the number of this year to 50,000 from the projected 110,000. In June 2017, a 120-day ban on most refugee arrivals in the US was instituted. Presently, the only refugees being admitted are those who can demonstrate a close family relationship and who have already completed the many steps in their security clearance and vetting process.

3. How do I bring friends/family in Syria to the US?

Right now, only a trickle of refugees are being admitted to the US, admissible due to close family relationships, and virtually none come from the Middle East. So there is little likelihood, at least in the near future, that there will many be opportunities to bring family and none to bring friends.

4. Refugees get huge settlement grants and interest free loans from the US government, don't they?

No. A modest grant of \$1,125 is provided on a per capita basis. Resettlement agencies are required to meet a variety of basic needs including housing, food and transportation costs for 90 days after arrival. Frequently, the needs exceed available funding as noted on the following chart:

Household Size	Single Person	2 People	3 People	4 People	5 People
Spending Money	\$20	\$30	\$30	\$40	\$40
Security Deposit	\$500	\$500	\$550	\$650	\$800
Rent (3 months)	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,650	\$1,950	\$2,400
Home Set-up	\$400	\$500	\$600	\$900	\$1,100
Utilities (3 months)	\$945	\$945	\$945	\$1,100	\$1,100
Food @ 5 day/each	\$150	\$300	\$450	\$600	\$750
Bus Pass (1 month)	\$90	\$180	\$180	\$240	\$240

Subtotal - Expense	\$3,605	\$3,955	\$4,405	\$5,480	\$6,430
Resettlement Allowance	\$1,125	\$2,250	\$3,375	\$4,500	\$5,625
Funding Gap	(\$2,480)	(\$1,705)	(\$1,030)	(\$980)	(\$805)

Sometimes, refugees live within walking distance of their services and do not need bus passes; other times their landlord might waive the security deposit. In any case, the resettlement agency must reach out to the community for charitable contributions to meet the funding gap, which averages \$100 per refugee sponsored.

To assist with initial transition, refugees are also eligible for TANF benefits (cash assistance) at MO State rates and Medicaid for no longer than eight months after arrival. However, since TANF rates are so low, most newly arrived refugees go to work as soon as they can find a job, regardless of their knowledge of English or previous work experience. For example, in 2014, the percent of families with at least one working adult was:

1. 4 months after arrival: 67%
2. 6 months after arrival: 85%

Refugees are required to begin repaying their travel loans which can cost as much as \$1,500/person after six months of residence in the US.

Finally, there are special small business start-up loans available for refugee entrepreneurs at the International Institute. However, the interest rate for such loans is higher than if they borrowed from a bank. Once they build their credit history and acquire collateral, we encourage such borrowers to seek business loans to a traditional banking institution.

5. Don't we risk admitting terrorists posing as Syrian refugees?

Admitting refugees to the US is a time consuming and rigorous multi-step process, which can take 18 months to two years to completion. Even then, less than 1/2 of one percent of the world's refugees will be selected.

Here is a [link](#) to a listing of thorough security and health checks that each refugee must undergo.

Throughout our history, each new refugee group admitted to the US has faced the same fears. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was widespread fear that North Vietnamese soldiers and spies had infiltrated the ranks of the Vietnamese Boat People. In the 1990s, native born Americans expressed fears about Bosnian Muslims and their Middle East affiliations. Decades later, as we look back on earlier resettlement waves, we realize that such fears were largely unfounded.

6. Refugees and other immigrants are competition for unemployed Americans, especially African-Americans, aren't they?

While it could seem counterintuitive, the presence of a large number of immigrants can actually boost wages and the standard of living for low-income native-born Americans, including African-Americans.

In spring 2013 Professor Jack Strauss, Miller Chair of Applied Economics at the University of Denver (and formerly of Saint Louis University) published a landmark study titled, "Allies, Not Enemies: How Latino Immigration Boosts African-American Employment and Wages."

He used a cross-section of 907 MSAs and 455 Metro areas in 2005, carefully controlling for "cause and effect." The results were fascinating. For instance, for every 1% increase in a city's share of Latinos, African-American median and mean wages increased by 3%. He deduced that if St. Louis's share of Latinos was as high as similarly-sized metro areas, African American wages would be approximately 30% higher. Additionally, he found that such growth in Latinos would result in significant job growth among all African-American age cohorts. There would be fewer in poverty and more with higher incomes as well.

This positive economic impact is related to population. The City of St. Louis has experienced a sharply declining population. St. Louis County population has also declined, albeit more modestly. Fewer residents create a spiraling down effect, resulting in a lower tax base, school enrollment and the loss of accessible jobs for city residents, many of whom are African-Americans.

We need new population to re-invigorate neighborhoods that are emptying out as residents move to St. Louis County. Since St. Louis and Missouri are comprised of an aging population, we cannot rely on birth rate among our current residents to replace the lost population. Immigration is the best means of increasing our population and rebuilding our cities for the benefit of all.

7. Can we really afford to settle refugees when we have limited dollars and other needs?

The initial cost of resettling refugees is modest since, within a few years, many refugee newcomers as with other immigrants, start small businesses. In a 2012 study by Professor Jack Strauss (noted in the previous section) titled "The Economic Impact of Immigration in St. Louis," Strauss noted that immigrants, regardless of education and skills background, are 60% more likely to start a small business than native-born Americans. Small business development is a major engine that drives the US economy. These small businesses purchase goods and services from other businesses, pay taxes, and otherwise help local communities, including St. Louis, build their economies to the benefit of all residents.

8. Will Syrians embrace our culture?

America is a nation of immigrants. While we all come from somewhere else, the vast majority of our ancestors, like today's immigrants, took pride in being Americans. More than 50% of Missouri's immigrants are US Citizens. They have studied our history, passed the exam and sworn an oath to our nation. They serve along-side of us in the military, work long hours to provide educational opportunity for their children, and observe customs that are more like frequently than different.

St. Louis' history and culture are a rich mosaic of the many different groups, which have settled here throughout our history. The cultures of Native Americans, Germans, Irish, Italian and others are now intertwined with those of more recent arrivals, including Vietnamese, Bosnian, Hispanic, Chinese, Congolese and more. Each arriving culture has brought new language, food, music, sometimes even religion. However, their shared behaviors and values are frequently the same. Long-timers and newcomers alike value excellent education, religious freedom, family, and community connectivity.

Other Muslims including Iraqis, Bosnians and Iranians have lived in St. Louis for many decades. Their children attend schools with our children; they live in our neighborhoods; they are business owners. They have joined us in the ranks of American citizenship and they love America, which became their new home when they had none. If we welcome them and provide opportunities for them to integrate, these newcomers, and their children, will help form the next generation of Americans dedicated to excellence locally and on a world stage.