



# METROPOLITAN POLICY PROGRAM

## From 'There' to 'Here': Refugee Resettlement in Metropolitan America

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*“Metropolitan areas are the critical context for refugees as they settle into communities and become active members of their neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces.”*

### Findings

Although refugees only comprise approximately 10 percent of annual immigration to the United States, they are a distinct part of the foreign-born population in many metropolitan areas. Using data from the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) on the location of initial settlement of refugees arriving between 1983 and 2004, this paper finds that:

- **More than 2 million refugees have arrived in the United States since the Refugee Act of 1980 was established, driven from their homelands by war, political change, and social, religious, and ethnic oppression.** These flows were marked first by refugees primarily from Southeast Asia and the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s during the *Cold War period*, followed by Europe in the 1990s during the *Balkans period*, and now a growing number from Africa in the 2000s during the *civil conflict period*.
- **Refugees have overwhelmingly been resettled in metropolitan areas with large foreign-born populations.** Between 1983 and 2004, refugees have been resettled across many metropolitan areas in the United States, with 30 areas receiving 72 percent of the total. The largest resettlement areas have been in established immigrant gateways in California (Los Angeles, Orange County, San Jose, Sacramento), the Mid-Atlantic region (New York) and the Midwest (Chicago, Minneapolis-St. Paul), as well as newer gateways including Washington, DC; Seattle, WA; and Atlanta, GA.
- **In medium-sized and smaller metropolitan areas, refugees can have considerable impact on the local population, especially if the total foreign-born population is small.** Refugees dominate the overall foreign-born population in smaller places such as Utica, NY; Fargo, ND; Erie, PA; Sioux Falls, SD; and Binghamton, NY helping to stem overall population decline or stagnation. Medium-sized metropolitan areas like Fresno, CA; Des Moines, IA; Springfield, MA; and Spokane, WA also have a strong refugee presence.
- **The leading refugee destination metro areas have shifted away from traditional immigrant gateways over the past two decades, while newer gateways are resettling proportionally more refugees.** While New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago still accommodated large numbers of refugees in the 1990s, other metropolitan areas such as Seattle, Atlanta, and Portland (OR) have taken in increasing numbers. Furthermore, different groups of refugees have become associated with different metropolitan areas: Nearly half of Iranian refugees were resettled in metropolitan Los Angeles, one in five Iraqi refugees arrived in Detroit, and nearly one-third of refugees from the former Soviet Union were resettled in New York.

Unlike other immigrants, refugees have access to considerable federal, state, and local support to help them succeed economically and socially. Affordable housing, health care access, job training and placement, and language learning dominate the local service needs that need to be built and maintained. Ultimately though, metropolitan areas are the critical context for refugees as they settle into communities and become active members of their neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces.

## Introduction

Most immigrants arrive in the United States having planned their journey. Often they know in advance where they will initially live and work when they arrive, and many can rely on family, friends, and compatriots to cushion their transition. In short, most immigrants have made choices about their future.

Refugees arrive under very different circumstances. Forced out of their home countries, often living in transitional quarters like temporary camps or housing in foreign countries, they often experience fear and uncertainty as they make their way to a safe place. Some refugees are uprooted from their home communities due to war, violence, and political conflict, as in Vietnam, Somalia, and Ethiopia. Others have experienced ethnic strife or religious persecution like the Albanians and Sudanese. The nature of their departure is unlike the path taken by the majority of contemporary immigrants to the United States and holds broad implications for their economic and social integration.

Similar to other immigrants in the United States, refugees possess a wide range of experiences and skills, and some are more accustomed to American life than others. Some refugees have work or language experience applicable to the U.S. labor market, but many do not. Some refugees are admitted to the United States because they have relatives already present, but many have no social ties nor any experience with U.S. institutions before they arrive.

The United States has a long history of providing safe haven for those escaping oppression and war. U.S. refugee policy has always been interconnected with foreign policy, most explicitly during the Cold War. Public opinion, pressure from congressional advocates, and media exposure to refugee situations can also influence

who the United States admits through the program.<sup>1</sup>

Currently, the maximum number of refugee entries is set every year by the president after consultation with Congress, based on humanitarian crises and U.S. foreign policies and relations with other countries. During the 1980s and 1990s, the United States accepted an average of 100,000 refugees for resettlement annually. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, however, levels were curtailed as security and background checks were enhanced.

Refugees are admitted to the United States via the Refugee Act of 1980, separate from the immigrant admissions program that allows families and workers to immigrate for legal permanent residency. Potential refugees are screened outside of the United States and must be determined by an officer of the Department of Homeland Security or by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees as meeting official refugee criteria.<sup>2</sup> They must not be firmly settled in another country, yet they must be living in a country not their own.<sup>3</sup> Another important difference between those who enter as legal permanent residents (LPRs) and refugees is that once in the United States, refugees have a legal status that is immediately tied to public assistance programs, whereas legal permanent residents are restricted from using federal public assistance for their first five years in the United States. Perhaps more so than immigrants admitted as LPRs, refugees' experiences are shaped by the conditions of their departure as well as their reception in the United States.

For the first time, this paper reports the *metropolitan* settlement patterns of the approximately 1.6 million refugees resettled by the U.S. government between 1983 and 2004.<sup>4</sup> The majority of refugees are resettled in large and medium-sized metropolitan areas, both in cities and suburbs. Although they often move after initial

resettlement, where they land first has important implications for those places as well as for the refugees themselves.

Metropolitan areas, where refugees have their first brush with America, serve as the immediate context for their initial encounters with the culture, lifestyle, and U.S. institutions and bureaucracies. But metropolitan areas are not monolithic, representing diverse settings where the social, cultural, and economic incorporation of refugees unfolds. In major immigrant gateways such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, where immigrants are plentiful and dispersed around the metropolitan area, refugees comprise a small proportion of the larger foreign-born mix. These kinds of places have experience in incorporating large and steady streams of the foreign born, especially in schools and the labor force. Refugees may benefit from the broader immigration dynamic, and their integration in these contexts may be quite different from those areas with low levels of immigration.

In other metropolitan areas, including those with few recent immigrants such as St. Louis and Baltimore, or smaller places like Utica, Des Moines, and Spokane, refugees have a potentially larger impact on local economies and neighborhoods. Because refugees begin their new lives in the United States relying upon organizations to assist them with basic needs such as housing, workforce readiness, and English language learning, in smaller metropolitan areas, they are often more visible and represent the public's primary encounter with immigration in these communities.

Often, comparative research on immigration to U.S. metropolitan areas does not distinguish between immigrants and refugees. However, the circumstances of refugee migration are distinct from other immigration. The refugee experience reflects the interplay between international, national, and local actors and institu-

tions. However, the refugee resettlement experience in practice is very much influenced by the availability and efforts of distinctly local resources and institutions. Refugees comprise but a small component of the overall flow of immigrants into the United States. During the past 20 years, refugees made up approximately 10 percent of all persons receiving legal permanent residency annually (DHS, 2004 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics). It is estimated that together, persons admitted to the United States as refugees and asylees comprise about 7 percent of the foreign-born stock currently living in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

This paper begins with an overview of how the U.S. refugee program works, including how refugees are placed in U.S. communities. Following this discussion is an analysis of refugee resettlement trends by decade, region and country of origin, and U.S. metropolitan destination. The paper then examines the role of refugees in the growth and change of the foreign-born population. Finally, several communities are examined in brief to provide a comparative study of how the context of refugee resettlement differs across metropolitan areas and what this means for their incorporation into the United States. By linking refugee resettlement to metropolitan areas we hope to highlight differences across places, and also address the implications for service provision and demographic change within receiving areas.

## Background

### *Historical Flows and the Emergence of U.S. Refugee Policy*

There are an estimated 12 million refugees in the world today. Defined in the 1951 U.N. Refugee Convention as people who are outside their homeland and are unwilling to return because of “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion,” refugees face an uncertain future. The U.N. recognizes three “durable solutions” for refugees, in order of preference: voluntary repatriation to their homeland, integration into the host society (known as the “country of first asylum”), or resettlement to a third country. This last option is pursued when the first two are not feasible, and less than one percent of the world’s refugees are referred for resettlement.

Reflecting its humanitarian values and tradition of being a safe haven, the U.S. maintains a policy of refugee acceptance. Of the ten countries that carry out resettlement programs, the U.S. accepts more than double the number of refugees accepted by the other nine countries combined. Factors influencing the U.S. government’s decisions to resettle particular refugees are a mixture of humanitarian and utilitarian: kinship, religious, and ethnic ties, a sense of guilt or obligation (especially following military involvement in another country), urgent human rights violations, and the desire to encourage ‘burden sharing’ whereby countries of first asylum allow refugees to remain within their borders.<sup>6</sup>

The first refugee legislation enacted in the U.S. was the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, which followed the admission of 250,000 Europeans displaced after World War II, and provided for an additional 400,000 admissions. Subsequent legislation focused on persons fleeing Commu-

nist regimes (mainly in Hungary, then-Yugoslavia, Korea, China, and Cuba). When Hungary was overtaken by the Soviet military in 1956, the United States began a series of refugee programs that relied on the attorney general’s “parole” authority to provide special permission to allow entry of refugees into the country due to urgent humanitarian reasons. In most cases parolees were admitted temporarily and later were granted permanent residence status. Thus, hundreds of thousands of Cubans who sought asylum in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s were paroled into the United States, as were hundreds of thousands of Southeast Asians following the fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese in 1975.<sup>7</sup>

In 1975, the U.S. created the Indochinese Refugee Task Force to begin to resettle hundreds of thousands of Indochinese displaced by the Vietnam War. Since that time, over 1.4 million Indochinese have been resettled in the U.S., and together with those from the former Soviet Union, they make up nearly 77 percent of the 2.4 million refugees who have been resettled in the U.S. since 1975.<sup>8</sup>

Realizing the ongoing need for the resettlement of refugees, Congress passed the **Refugee Act of 1980** to systematize entry into the United States and to standardize the domestic services provided to all refugees admitted to the U.S. This act statutorily defines refugees admitted to the United States as provided by the U.N. Refugee Convention. It also authorizes Congress to set annual ceilings for regular and emergency admissions and allows for federal funding to support refugee resettlement. Furthermore, it provides for the adjustment to permanent residence status for refugees who have been present in the country for at least one year.

Between April and October of 1980, 125,000 Cubans arrived by boat in Southern Florida in what became known as the Mariel boatlift. These

arrivals immediately challenged the just-enacted refugee system allowing for the entry of refugees from abroad. In addition, Haitians fleeing their country's deteriorating economic and political conditions began arriving by boat in the 1980s. By arriving directly to U.S. waters, Cubans and Haitians were not considered to be refugees under the provision of the Refugee Act, which stipulated that refugees were to be processed outside the United States. In 1994, another wave of Cubans and Haitians began arriving by boat to the United States. More than 30,000 Cubans and more than 20,000 Haitians were interdicted at sea and sent to camps in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Most of the Cubans were eventually admitted to the United States after several agreements were made between the United States and Cuba. About half of the Haitians were paroled into the U.S. after being pre-screened at Guantanamo and determined to have a credible fear of persecution if returned to Haiti. The current "wet foot-dry foot" policy allows Cubans who reach U.S. soil to stay, but turns those caught at sea back to Cuba unless they can demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution. Haitians—like all other nationalities seeking asylum—are not accorded the same exception to the rule, and must demonstrate a fear of persecution no matter where they are intercepted.

In 1989, the Lautenberg Amendment was enacted, easing the admission criteria for Jews and Evangelical Christians from the former Soviet Union, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Under this law, now called the Specter Amendment and expanded to include religious minorities from Iran, persons are required to provide evidence of the possibility of persecution, rather than its actual occurrence. This legislation has boosted the number of refugees from these countries.

### *From "There" to "Here:" The U.S. Refugee Program*

How refugees wind up living in U.S. communities is a multi-layered process that involves U.S. and international public and private entities. First, an international priority system is used to identify those most in need of resettlement. Priority One (P1) are those people (usually individuals but recently groups have been identified) that are referred by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or U.S. embassies and are usually in imminent danger. The U.S. has committed to accepting half of such referrals, and P1 refugees make up about one-third of those admitted to this country. The State Department's Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) identifies groups "of special humanitarian concern" as Priority Two (P2). Examples include the Somali Bantu, Baku Armenians, Cubans, and Iranian religious minorities. P2s make up about half of refugees. Priority Three (P3) are close family members of refugees already resettled in the U.S. from a handful of eligible countries (currently Burma, Burundi, Colombia, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Liberia, Somalia, and Sudan). P3s make up about 20 percent of refugees.

Unlike asylum seekers who apply for protection after arriving on U.S. soil, refugees receive permission to immigrate to the U.S. while they are still abroad. Overseas Processing Entities (OPEs) such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) are contracted by the PRM to prepare cases for submission to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). DHS reviews refugee applications, runs background checks, interviews individuals, and makes the legal determination of refugee admission. The State Department manages cultural orientation and, through the IOM, transportation to the U.S. (as a loan to be repaid by the refugee).

Voluntary agencies ("volags" in the

vernacular) based in New York and Washington meet with PRM staff on a weekly basis to determine which refugees will go to which states. PRM provides reception and placement (R&P) services to refugees for their first 30 days in the country. The Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services provides funds to participating states and volags (and their local partners) to provide assistance with housing, employment, language learning, and other services for four to eight months after arrival. Longer term assistance is available through state social service programs as well as private, non-profit refugee organizations known as Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs), which also provide a way for refugees to connect with their compatriots in the U.S.

U.S. refugee policy is made at the federal level, but local actors—particularly the volags and state refugee coordinators—play important roles in determining where refugees settle. In this public-private partnership, there are ten national volags, each of which maintains a network of local partners. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is the largest volag with about 300 local affiliates.<sup>10</sup> The weekly placement decisions made by the national volags and PRM are, when possible, based on the location of refugees' family members or pre-existing ethnic communities. About two-thirds of refugee cases are "tied" or "family" cases, where refugees are joining families or friends, and placement must be made within one hundred miles of a local volag affiliate office. The other one-third are "free" cases, where the refugee has no contacts in the U.S. These placements must be made within 50 miles of a local volag office. In the case of no pre-existing ethnic community or family ties, placement decisions are based on the availability of jobs, affordable housing, receptivity of the local community, specialized services (such as trauma centers for

post-traumatic stress disorder), and the strength of the local volag affiliate.<sup>11</sup>

With the exception of Wyoming, which opted out of the refugee program, each state has a refugee coordinator, who usually works in the department of health or social services. The state refugee coordinator is responsible for submitting the annual state plan for refugee assistance to ORR, which is used for allocating federal funds for cash and medical assistance to refugees, and overseeing the administration of federal and state funds for refugees. The coordinator also keeps statistics on immigrants, refugees, asylees, and secondary migrants in their state, and is aware of projections of arriving refugees. The coordinator serves as a liaison between local jurisdictions and volags and is the main point of contact for local government officials regarding refugee issues.

The U.S. refugee resettlement program aims to promote early economic self-sufficiency among refugees. Many local organizations and volunteers work with refugees to assist in getting them acclimated. Refugees resettled in the U.S. are automatically granted employment authorization, and after one year may apply for legal permanent residence. In its annual report for 2002, the Office of Refugee Resettlement reported that a survey of refugees residing in the United States for less than five years had labor force participation rates similar to the total U.S. population and that 69 percent were entirely self-sufficient and did not need cash assistance.<sup>12</sup> Refugees are eligible for Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) and Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) for no longer than eight months after their arrival, and volags typically provide assistance for the first four to eight months that a refugee is in the country.

## Data and Methodology

The primary data source for this study comes from a special data tabulation of the Worldwide Refugee Application Processing System (WRAPS), obtained from the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). These records include all refugees who were granted refugee status and admitted to the United States for the 1983–2004 period. It does not include various classes of entrants under ORR’s purview, including asylees, Amerasians, and Cuban and Haitian entrants. It excludes refugees who arrived prior to FY1983 because the data are unavailable from ORR. Data on age and sex composition are not provided.

The data include the refugee’s year of entry, country of origin, and place resettled (city, county, and state) in the United States. Year of entry refers to the U.S. government’s fiscal year (October 1 through September 30) during which the refugee entered the U.S. All years refer to federal fiscal years (for example 1983 is October 1982–September 1983), with the exception of 2004, which runs through June of that year. Although the U.S. refugee program predates this period, records that include metropolitan area data are only available for the 1983–2004 period.

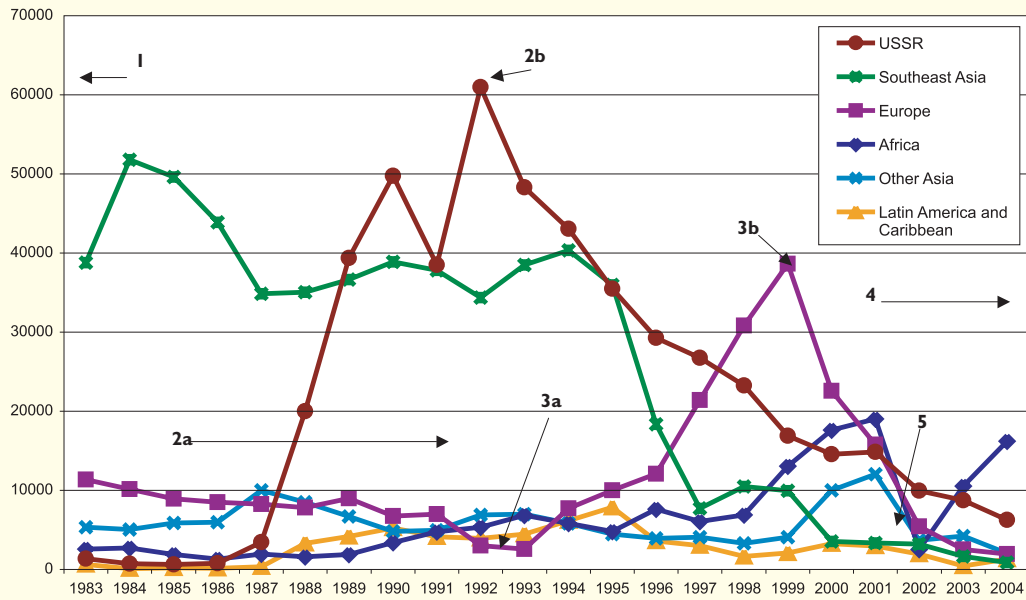
Country of origin refers to the country from which the refugee originally fled. Thus, a Somali in a refugee camp in Kenya who was resettled in the U.S. would be counted under “Somalia.” Over time, some national boundaries have changed, and new countries have formed. For the purposes of this analysis, the former Soviet republics are counted as “USSR” throughout the time period. Former USSR includes the following present-day nations: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turk-

menistan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine. Refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, Kosovo, and Slovenia are all included in “Yugoslavia.” After 1993, when Eritrea became a separate nation, Eritrean refugees are counted separately from Ethiopians. In total, more than 125 countries are represented in the data.

In this dataset, “place resettled” refers to the location of the local voluntary agency responsible for the initial placement of the refugee. Therefore, the data are presented for the metropolitan area where refugees are first resettled, not necessarily where they reside at the present time. Resettlement policy requires the placement of refugees within 100 miles (50 miles in the case of “free cases”) of the local voluntary agency responsible for their resettlement. Data on the place of resettlement (city, state) were aggregated to metropolitan areas, by overlaying the metropolitan area boundaries (using 1999 OMB MSA/PMSA definitions) on the point location of the cities using GIS. Some records were missing city data, in which case we used county data to determine the metropolitan area. All points that did not fall within a metropolitan area were coded “nonmetropolitan” (accounting for 33,255 refugees or 2 percent of the total). Records with neither city nor county data (24,022 refugees or less than 2 percent of the total) were coded “unknown” for metropolitan status, as were a small number of records with place names that could not be identified. All but two of the 331 metropolitan areas in the U.S. received at least one refugee during the time period; 168 metros received 500 or more.<sup>13</sup>

For comparative purposes, this study also uses Census 2000 Summary Files for the metropolitan area of residence of the foreign-born population residing in the U.S. on April 1, 2000. As measured by the Census Bureau, the foreign-born population includes

Figure 1. Major Refugee Flows by Region of Origin, 1983–2004



1. Large Cuban and Indochinese waves of refugees, prior to 1983  
 2a. Cold War Period: Glastnost/Perestroika, 1985–1991  
 2b. Soviet Union dismantled, Dec. 1991  
 3a. Balkans Period: Break-up of Yugoslavia, 1992

3b. Expulsions of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, 1998  
 4. Civil Conflict Period: Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Ethiopia, late 1990s-present  
 5. Terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001

anyone not a U.S. citizen at birth, and data are not differentiated by legal status. These data therefore include refugees resettled prior to April, 2000 who were residing in the United States at the time of the census. But they also include other statuses of immigrants such as LPRs, naturalized citizens, temporary immigrants, and the undocumented. Refugees cannot be isolated and identified among the foreign-born in census data. These census data are used to compare the overall foreign-born directly with the refugee population in metropolitan areas.

Country-level data are not always directly comparable between Census and ORR since the Census Summary Files do not disaggregate data into the smaller country-of-origin populations. Thus, data on some major refugee source countries are not explicitly available from Census. Somalia, for

example, would be included under the broader category of “Other East Africa” in Census data. Likewise, many of the refugees counted under “Yugoslavia” in the ORR dataset would be counted under “Bosnia and Herzegovina,” “Serbia and Montenegro,” etc. in the Census data.

**Findings**

**A. More than 2 million refugees have arrived in the United States since the Refugee Act of 1980 was established, driven from their homelands by war, political change, and social and ethnic oppression.**

Figure 1 shows the major refugee entries to the United States during the 1983 to 2004 period by region of origin. These twenty years can be broken into three distinct periods, characterized by the origins of the refugees

admitted to the United States.<sup>14</sup>

Several origin countries dominate the Cold War period, beginning prior to the start of the Refugee Act in 1980 and extending to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. During this time, large numbers of refugees fleeing communism were welcomed, and the largest source of refugees was from the USSR (154,630). After the Soviet Union was dismantled in late-1991, refugee admissions from this region continued but began to decline and by the mid-1990s they were half the number of their 60,000 peak in 1992. During the long-running Vietnamese War, several waves of refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were admitted to the United States. They are grouped together in the Southeast Asian category in Figure 1, and between 1983 and 1991 the United States admitted between 35,000 to 52,000 each year, for a total

**Table 1. Largest Refugee Sending Countries, 1983–2004<sup>^</sup>**

Rank	Country	Total Refugees, 1983–2004
1	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*	493,040
2	Vietnam	387,741
3	Yugoslavia**	168,644
4	Laos	113,504
5	Cambodia	71,433
6	Iran	61,349
7	Cuba	51,787
8	Somalia	47,753
9	Iraq	35,252
10	Ethiopia	35,144
11	Romania	34,665
12	Afghanistan	31,180
13	Poland	28,809
14	Sudan	22,647
15	Liberia	20,925
16	Czech Republic	7,535
17	Haiti	6,815
18	Sierra Leone	6,028
19	Hungary	5,124
20	Albania	3,660
21	Democratic Republic of Congo	3,191
22	Burma	2,714
23	Bulgaria	1,971
24	Austria	1,541
25	Nicaragua	1,536
26	Nigeria	1,249
27	Rwanda	1,238
28	Togo	1,038
29	Burundi	908
30	Colombia	504

<sup>^</sup> Refers to fiscal years with the exception of 2004, for which data ends in June

\* This category includes all the newly formed countries of the Former Soviet Union after 1992.

\*\* This category includes all the newly formed countries of the former Yugoslavia after 1992.

Source: Authors' tabulation of ORR data

of 367,174. Their entry into the United States also preceded the U.S. Refugee Act, as mentioned above.

Two events punctuated *the Balkans period* between 1992 and 2000. Yugoslavia began to break up in 1992, and the United States commenced admitting refugees from the successor states of Yugoslavia: primarily Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also Serbia and Montenegro (including Kosovo), Croatia, Macedonia, and Slovenia. In 1998,

Kosovar Albanians rebelled against Serbian rule and many fled, eventually becoming refugees entering the United States. Altogether in this second period 146,534 refugees were admitted from the Balkans.

The third period from the late 1990s to the present includes refugees from more diverse origins. The *civil conflict period* is characterized largely by the many refugees fleeing conflict in Africa during the late-1990s to the

present. Due to political and civil clashes on the African continent, Somali, Sudanese, Liberian, and Ethiopian refugees make up the majority of admissions. But another important source is refugees from the category “other Asia,” mainly Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

This period is also marked by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which temporarily halted the flow of all refugees into the United States. The number of refugee approvals was curtailed, and admissions currently remain well below levels prior to the attacks.<sup>15</sup> Refugee admissions from most regions other than Africa were already on the decline by the late-1990s. The ceiling for FY 2006 has been set at 70,000 for refugees from all regions, with 30,000 allotted to Africa.

Refugees have come from more than 125 countries during the period under study and number 1,655,406 in total. Despite this number, flows are dominated by the nearly half a million refugees from the former Soviet Union arriving during the 1983–2004 period. (See Table 1 for the largest refugee sending countries.) The second largest group, the Vietnamese, total nearly 400,000. Following these two groups, refugees from other countries register much lower overall numbers. The next two largest groups, the former Yugoslavia and Laos are nearly 169,000 and 114,000 respectively. These countries are followed by Cambodia (61,000), Iran (52,000), Cuba (48,000), Somalia (35,000), Iraq (35,000), and Ethiopia (35,000). Romania, Afghanistan, Poland, Sudan, and Liberia have between 20,000 and 35,000 refugee arrivals for the period. Fifteen countries—primarily from Africa and Eastern Europe—each sent between 1,000 and 7,500 refugees to the United States.

Nationality often masks the persecuted ethnic or religious minority groups to which a refugee belongs. For example, the Hmong are largely from



Laos but also from Vietnam, and both countries have a number of other distinct ethnic and linguistic groups that also are refugees. Another example is that of the successor states of the Soviet Union, which are grouped together in this dataset but they actually represent various religious and ethnic groups. These sub- or supra-national identities have important implications for integration into U.S. communities. Furthermore, religion is a factor for many refugees' decisions to relocate once in the United States. Cambodian and Laotian Buddhists, for example, have migrated from initial settlement areas to the Piedmont Triad area in North Carolina because of a temple that was established in Greensboro. Refugees originally were attracted to the area due to factory jobs. The economic stability of the region inspired many to put down roots and the temple, its services, and monk became well-known, which served to draw a wider group to the area.<sup>16</sup> Because many of the voluntary agencies are associated with a particular origin or religious group, some may "specialize" in resettling particular

refugee groups, resulting in concentrations of particular groups in specific areas.

***B. Refugees have overwhelmingly been resettled in metropolitan areas with large foreign-born populations.*** Refugees have been resettled across all U.S. states and the District of Columbia. California and New York have absorbed the most refugees during the past twenty years with 405,806 and 235,325 respectively. Texas, Washington state, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota follow, each with between 48,000 and nearly 86,000 refugees resettled. Together 67 percent of all refugees were resettled in these nine states. Fifteen other states have resettled between 15,000 and 43,000 refugees, and the remaining 27 states have resettled fewer than 15,000 (See Figure 2 and Table 2).

Table 2 provides a side-by-side comparison of the ten states with the largest number of refugees resettled and the largest foreign-born resident population. The appearance of Washington in the fourth spot on the

refugee side is significant, as metropolitan Seattle's refugee population is making an impact on that state's ranking. The appearance of Pennsylvania and Minnesota on the list of top ten receiving states is also salient, as these two states are less likely overall to receive other foreign-born residents.

More than 95 percent of all refugees admitted have been resettled in cities and suburbs of metropolitan areas, or 1,575,925 refugees in total during the period of study. The U.S. refugee program aims to disperse refugees throughout communities so as not to place a burden on specific localities or agencies. But the program works first to reunite refugees with relatives and others with ties to anchor them in their new communities and to ease the incorporation process.<sup>17</sup>

Refugees are free to move after their initial placement. Often they move to areas where there are established communities of others from the same part of the world or with the same ethnic or religious identity. An ORR survey reports that much of the secondary migration among refugees

**Table 2. Ten States with Largest Number of Refugees Resettled and Largest Number of Foreign-Born Residents**

State	Number of Refugees*	Percent of All U.S. Refugees	State	Number of Foreign Born**	Percent of All U.S. Foreign Born
California	405,806	24.5	California	8,864,255	28.5
New York	235,325	14.2	New York	3,868,133	12.4
Texas	85,750	5.2	Texas	2,899,642	9.3
Washington	81,857	4.9	Florida	2,670,828	8.6
Florida	73,211	4.4	Illinois	1,529,058	4.9
Illinois	70,248	4.2	New Jersey	1,476,327	4.7
Massachusetts	54,000	3.3	Massachusetts	772,983	2.5
Pennsylvania	52,095	3.1	Arizona	656,183	2.1
Minnesota	48,820	2.9	Washington	614,457	2.0
Georgia	43,068	2.6	Georgia	577,273	1.9
Totals	1,655,406	69.5		31,107,889	76.9

\*Number of refugees initially resettled in that state during the 1983-2004 period.

\*\*Total number of foreign-born residents, 2000.

Source: Authors' tabulation of ORR and Census 2000 data















































