

Refugee Resettlement per Capita: Which States Do the Most?

The United States refugee resettlement program helps people from some of the most dramatically troubled situations around the world to find a home in the United States.

Refugees are people who the government has determined have a well-founded fear of persecution, have gone through an extensive vetting process, and who have typically waited many years before arriving in the United States. Among the top countries of origin for refugees over the past decade are Myanmar (Burma), Iraq, Bhutan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Iran, Syria, Cuba, and Ukraine. In the U.S., the refugee resettlement program is a public-private partnership of the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, the Department of Health and Human Services, and nine national resettlement agencies.

Over the past 10 years, the states that have received the most refugees have been Texas (44,000), California (40,000), New York (27,000), and Michigan (23,000).

These are all states with a large population. A different way to consider the state role in resettlement is to look at refugee arrivals as a share of the state population.

Taken this way, the states with the highest share of refugees placed may seem surprising. Measuring refugee arrivals as a share 100,000 people in the current state population, are: Nebraska (379), North Dakota (378), Idaho (346), Kentucky (325), South Dakota (312), Vermont (310), and Arizona (274).

A different way to think about resettlement is to calculate refugee arrivals as a share of a state's overall immigrant population. In some states, refugees are a very substantial part of the overall picture of immigration. In other states, when local residents think about immigrants, refugees are likely to be a small part of that picture. There is a good deal of overlap at the top of the table: Nebraska, North Dakota, Idaho, Kentucky, South Dakota, and Vermont are all among the top states for refugee arrivals per capita and for refugee arrivals as a share of immigrants. But in many states there is a substantial divergence. Maine, for example, is 15th on the list for refugee arrivals

NEBRASKA TOPS THE LIST OF REFUGEE ARRIVALS PER CAPITA

	Refugee Arrivals in Past 10 Years	Refugee Arrivals per 100,000 State Population	Refugee Arrivals per 100,000 Immigrants in State	
1	Nebraska	7,450	379	5,158
2	North Dakota	2,930	378	8,662
3	Idaho	6,577	346	5,700
4	Kentucky	14,671	325	8,061
5	South Dakota	2,793	312	9,015
6	Vermont	2,001	310	7,356
7	Arizona	19,950	274	2,178
8	Washington	20,454	264	1,789
9	Minnesota	13,944	244	2,861
10	Michigan	22,769	227	3,332
11	Utah	7,031	211	2,526
12	New Hampshire	2,672	192	3,253
13	Iowa	6,118	192	3,536
14	Colorado	10,547	181	1,849
15	Maine	2,481	181	4,425
16	Ohio	20,892	177	3,572
17	North Carolina	17,333	164	1,993
18	Oregon	6,933	163	1,681
19	Kansas	4,711	161	2,333
20	Missouri	9,897	160	3,939
21	Georgia	17,170	159	1,585
22	Indiana	10,570	155	2,786
23	Massachusetts	10,488	150	854
24	Wisconsin	8,743	148	2,907
25	Texas	43,527	147	855
26	Maryland	9,037	147	923
27	Tennessee	9,791	140	2,641
28	Pennsylvania	17,723	137	1,888
29	New York	26,586	134	600
30	Rhode Island	1,460	133	916
31	Illinois	16,219	128	899
32	Nevada	3,805	121	656
33	Virginia	8,960	104	837
34	Alaska	740	101	1,253
35	California	39,509	101	378
36	Connecticut	3,481	97	634
37	Florida	17,104	79	371
38	New Mexico	1,555	73	807
39	Oklahoma	2,504	63	1,086
40	Montana	487	44	1,991
41	South Carolina	1,985	38	732
42	New Jersey	2,967	32	139
43	Louisiana	911	20	456
44	Alabama	648	13	367
45	Arkansas	386	13	270
46	Delaware	127	13	125
47	Washington D.C.	66	10	74
48	West Virginia	142	8	510
49	Mississippi	71	2	113
50	Hawaii	18	1	7
51	Wyoming	1	0	5
	United States	458,977	138	1,014

Fig. 1 Immigration Research Initiative analysis of Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, for placement of refugees by federal fiscal year (ending in September), and 2019 American Community Survey data for state population.

per capita, with 181 refugees per 100,000 in the total state population, but 7th for refugees as a share of immigrants, with 4,425 refugees per 100,000 immigrants living in Maine. Missouri is 20th per capita, but 8th as a share of immigrants, and Tennessee is 27th per capita and 16th as a share of immigrants.

Refugee resettlement has also changed dramatically over the past ten years. The president, without action from congress, has a great deal more influence over refugee resettlement than over other aspects of immigration policy. Each year, a cap on the number of refugee arrivals is set by presidential determination. Other factors have an impact on how many refugees are actually resettled, but the total number cannot exceed the cap set by the president.

During the Trump Administration, the number of refugee arrivals plummeted from 85,000 in 2016 to just 12,000 in 2020. The 2022 total was 25,000, as resettlement agencies and the overall program picks up the pieces and rebuilds gradually after a precipitous decline.

The ranking of state resettlement per capita has shifted some over this time, but the states generally maintained roughly the relative positions they had before the reduction in numbers. In 2022, Kentucky is the top state for resettlement per capita, Idaho is second, and Nebraska is third.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT: BEGINNING TO REBUILD AFTER A DRAMATIC DECLINE

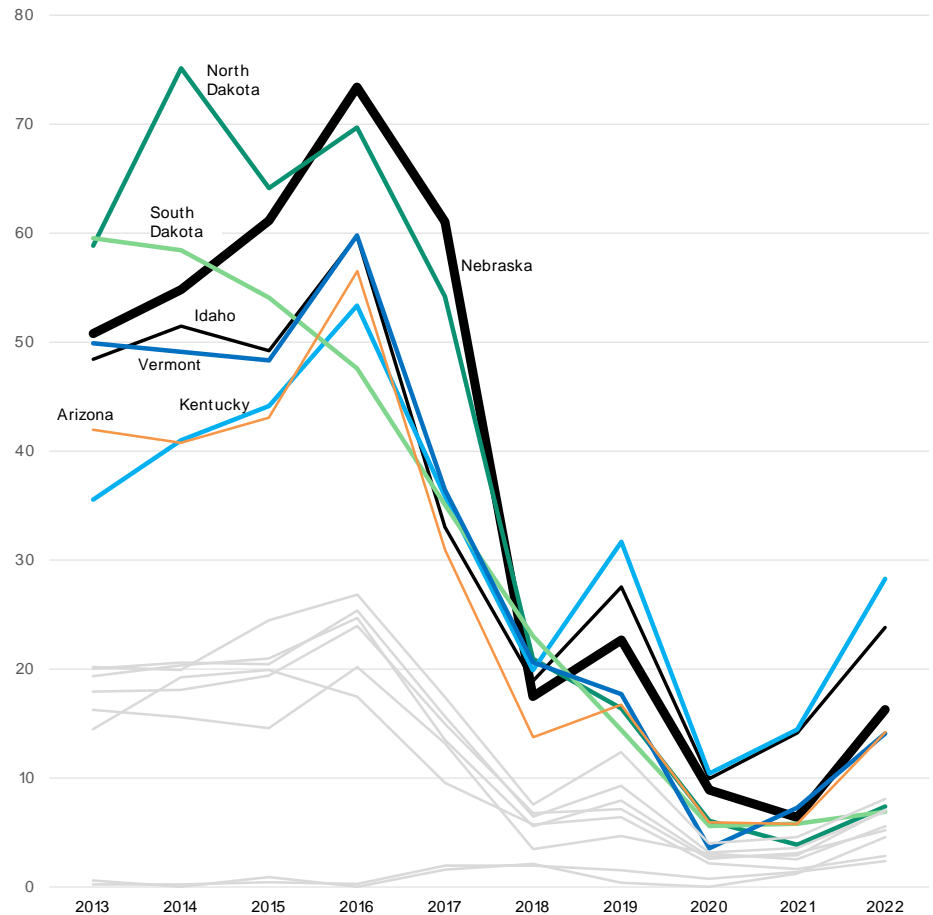


Fig. 2 Immigration Research Initiative analysis of Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, for placement of refugees by federal fiscal year (ending in September), and 2019 American Community Survey data for state population.

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