PR6: Refugee Resettlement Trends in the West

REPORT

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Refugee Resettlement in Small Cities Reports

**RRSC-PR1 (2017):**
Approved Resettlement Trends in the US

**RRSC-PR2 (2017):**
Region 1 Resettlement (Northeast)

**RRSC-PR3 (2018):**
Region 2 Resettlement (Southeast)

**RRSC-PR4 (2018):**
Region 3 Resettlement (Midwest)

**RRSC-PR5 (2018):**
Region 4 Resettlement (South-Central)

**RRSC-PR6 (2018):**
Region 5 Resettlement (West)
This report focuses on refugee resettlement trends from FY2012-2016 for the West region of the United States. Historically, the Western United States has had extensive experience with migration, primarily with immigrants from Asia and Latin America (Gutierrez, 2013; Zong & Batalova 2016). Among these states, California has the largest foreign-born population, which also leads the entire United States, while states such as Arizona and Washington also have sizable immigrant populations (American Immigration Council, 2017). Refugee resettlement in this region is focused on many of these states with large pre-existing foreign populations, but also extends to cities in eastern Washington, Idaho, and Utah that have less experience with immigration historically.

As part of our project, we analyze resettlement on a regional scale, looking at cities listed as official resettlement sites within each of five broad regions in the continental US in terms of the absolute number of refugees approved for settlement in each city and how that figure compares to each city’s overall population and foreign-born population (FBP). The current practice has been that the US federal government announces an upper limit on refugees it will accept for each fiscal year, a number that is then revised based on both local capacity and global conditions – such as new or changing migration crises or the actual number of who have been resettled in the site to that date (or as we have seen more recently, due to drastic changes in refugee policy itself).

Key Findings

• Montana and Wyoming hardly participated in the US resettlement program during this time, with only 85 refugees approved between the two states from FY2012-2016.

• Large cities still led resettlement in absolute terms for much of the region, although smaller cities like Kent, WA (5,050), Richland, WA (1,138), and Twin Falls, ID (1,500) approved relatively high numbers as well.

• California (the leading state for resettlement in the US) centered its resettlement program heavily on the Bay Area and metropolitan Los Angeles, as well as parts of the northern Central Valley. San Diego, however, approved more than any other site in the entire country with 16,682 approved between FY2012-16.

• Several sites in Washington, Idaho, and Utah had notable impacts on their foreign-born populations through resettlement during this time, while most sites in California were having less of an effect on their foreign-born populations. This is reflective of California’s history of migration, primarily from Asia and Latin America, forming the largest foreign-born population of any state in the US (Hill & Hayes, 2017; Johnson & Sanchez, 2018).

The Context of Resettlement in the US

• More than 230 sites were approved as official resettlement locations across the US during our study period.

• Approximately 75,000 refugees were approved for resettlement each year across the US in the first four years of this study:
  o FY2012: 78,765
  o FY2013: 73,963
  o FY2014: 74,751
  o FY2015: 76,912

• The US increased planned resettlements to 85,000 in FY 2016 in response to the global migration crisis affecting North and Sub-Saharan Africa as well as the Middle East as sending countries and the European continent as receiving countries.

• The main refugee populations resettled in the US during FY2012-2016 came from Burma, Iraq, Bhutan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Somalia and Ukraine

The total amounts noted here are the numbers of refugees approved to resettle by the federal government in cooperation with the resettlement agencies. It should be noted that the actual resettlement sites where refugees end up may differ from the sites noted in our study. This is because the official resettlement site is most often listed as the same as the address of the local resettlement agency. This office location may be somewhat different from the towns, municipalities or metropolitan regions where the bulk of refugees are actually initially placed. There is also the issue of specific neighborhoods within towns and cities where refugee resettlement is most heavily concentrated, making it more difficult to see how resettlement numbers compare to broader municipal statistics, especially in larger urban areas. These challenges in many ways limit our ability to provide a complete analysis of the effects of resettlement at a smaller scale and are important to keep in mind when using this data.

While the first report of this series focused on state resettlement at a national scale, this series of reports focuses more on city-level resettlement with a particular emphasis on five different regions – broadly grouped as states in the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, South-Central, and West. Within each of these regions, we take a closer look at several selected resettlement sites in order to explore what resettlement looks like on the ground. We have chosen to look at several specific sets of outcomes in each of these sites in categories that are particularly important for integration over the period 2010-2015 (which overlaps with our study period) in order to start asking what the successes and challenges of resettlement may have been during this time. In this particular report, we focus on employment, education, housing and poverty rates and have created some preliminary visualizations of the data. All maps and analysis are based on information collected via the Worldwide Refugee Processing System (WRAPS), data made available through the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration of the US Department of State. We offer these reports as a means of analyzing resettlement patterns and trends from the national, state and local level in light of the increasing controversies and politicization of resettlement over the past number of years.

Given our broad definition of each region, the ‘West’ report will cover resettlement in the following states: AZ, CA, ID, MT, NV, OR, UT, WA, and WY. We are aware that some of these states and cities may not all be considered in the same region, or the region we typically define as the West, and rather includes states that may more generally be considered part of Southwest, Northwest, or Mountain West. Within this region, there are three states that were among the leaders nationally in approved capacity between FY2012 and FY2016: California (1st) approved 42,486; Arizona (6th) approved 17,203; and Washington (7th) approved 15,130. Arizona, however, is the only state to also be among the leaders nationally in per capita resettlement. The only states ahead of Arizona (0.27%) in per capita resettlement are North Dakota (0.32%), South Dakota (0.32%), and Idaho (0.32%), despite a combined approved capacity of the three of only 9,840 compared to 17,203 approved in Arizona.
Observations

- Major cities still lead resettlement in the region (i.e. San Diego [16,682], Phoenix [10,457], and Portland [5,206]).

- The highest density of sites in the region was around the Bay Area-Central Valley in California, but southern California still approved far more refugees in absolute terms when including San Diego.

- Kent, WA [5,050] approved slightly more than Seattle, WA [4,625], despite being a fraction of the size. This was the only example in the region where a major city did not lead its state’s resettlement in absolute terms.

- Between Richland, WA [1,138] and Spokane, WA [2,756], several thousand refugees were approved for eastern Washington, where there is much less history of migration than the western part of the state.

- Outside of southern California, the only other site in the state that approved more than 3,000 was Sacramento, CA [5,096].

- Both Oregon’s and Utah’s resettlement programs ran solely through their respective largest cities, Portland, OR [5,206] and Salt Lake City, UT [5,889].

- Richland, WA, Twin Falls, ID and Turlock, CA were the only sites with a population of fewer than 100,000 people in the region that are not within a metropolitan area of a larger city.
Figure 6.2 shows approved settlement capacity in FY2012-2016 as a percentage of city population in the 2010 census and 2013 American Community Survey (ACS). Although some of the larger cities and metropolitan areas approve the highest absolute number of refugees, some smaller cities emerge as leaders in resettlement if you consider the population of each site.

**Observations**

- While there were 7 cities that approved between 2.0% and 6.0% in the region, none approved more than 6% of their population (Los Gatos, CA – 2.21%; North Highlands, CA – 2.34%; Richland, WA – 2.37%; Glendale, CA – 2.54%; Salt Lake City, UT – 3.16%; Twin Falls, ID – 3.40%; Kent, WA – 5.46%)

- Some smaller cities emerged as leaders in resettlement when accounting for city population, or at least surpass their larger counterparts, as in the case in: Turlock (1.26%) – Modesto (0.53%); Glendale, CA (2.56%) – Los Angeles (0.15%); Los Gatos (2.21%) – San Jose (0.15%); and North Highlands (2.34%) – Sacramento (1.09%).

- Arizona resettlement was fairly evenly distributed among its 3 resettlement sites when considering per capita resettlement: Phoenix (0.72%), Glendale (0.89%) and Tucson (0.91%).
Figure 6.3 shows refugee resettlement as a percentage of each city’s overall foreign-born population (FBP). Foreign-born population records anyone who is not a US citizen at birth, including those who become US citizens through naturalization. Refugees are eligible to naturalize five years after their arrival. All FBP data comes from the 2013 American Community Survey (ACS).

Observations

- Sites in Washington, Idaho, and Utah approved the highest percentages of their FBPs for the region. Within these three states, there were several mid-sized cities that approved large percentages of their foreign-born population: Spokane, WA (18.81%), Boise, ID (23.49%), and Salt Lake City, UT (18.20%).

- Despite such large absolute numbers for resettlement in California, there were generally low percentages of FBPs approved, especially in southern California. This is representative of the long history of migration in the state, and both Los Angeles and San Francisco as traditional “gateway” cities historically (Singer, 2013).

- While only approving 50 and 35 refugees respectively, Missoula, MT, and Casper, WY have still approved nearly 2.5% of their foreign-born population, suggesting a lack of migration in these states.
A Closer Look at South-Central Resettlement

In the previous regions, we looked at some demographics of three resettlement sites in the region. These cities were chosen based on three criteria that each site needed to have: 1) be among the leaders in one of the three previous data visualizations (approved capacity, percentage of population, and percentage of FBP) 2) have a population of less than 100,000 3) not fall within the metropolitan area of a large city such as Los Angeles, Phoenix, Seattle etc. As described in the introduction, one challenge to our study is the sites listed are that of the head resettlement office in the area, and not necessarily the location where the majority of resettlement takes place. Twin Falls, ID was selected as the leading city of its size in the region for approved capacity; Richland, WA as a leader for percentage of city population; and Turlock, CA for percentage of foreign-born population. We look in particular at several socio-economic indicators – education, poverty, unemployment, and rental vacancy rates from the 2010 census and 2015 ACS data – to examine more closely how some of the sites where refugees have been placed have evolved over the FY2012-2016 period. We do not wish to suggest a direct causal relationship between refugee placements and socio-economic indicators; rather, we are interested in understanding the broader environment into which refugees are being settled. What is the housing and employment situation in each of these towns and is it improving? What do poverty and education look like in each site?

**Education Rates**

![Education Rates Graph](image)

**Analysis**

Although all three sites saw at least some increase in high graduation rates between 2010 (85%) and 2015 (86.7%), Turlock and Twins Falls were both below the national average. Meanwhile, Richland was well above the national average at 95.4% for 2015. Turlock was still 5.5% below the national average for 2015, despite having the largest increase among these cities between 2010 and 2015.

**Poverty Rates**

![Poverty Rates Graph](image)

**Analysis**

With the national average of individuals living below the poverty line at 15.5% for 2015 (up from 13.8% in 2010), Richland was the only city below the national average in either year. Twin Falls and Turlock had similar poverty levels as one another in both years, with Turlock having the highest rate for 2015 at 17.5%.

**Unemployment Rates**

![Unemployment Rates Graph](image)

**Analysis**

Turlock was the only one of these sites above the national average for both 2010 (7.9%) and 2015 (8.3%), and, at 13.8% for 2015, was well above Richland (5.8%) and Twin Falls (6.5%). Turlock also experienced the greatest change in unemployment during this time, jumping more than 3% from 10.6% in 2010. Richland’s unemployment remained relatively static during this time, while Twins Falls increased from 1.1% to 6.4% for 2015, still well below the national average.

**Rental Vacancy Rates**

![Rental Vacancy Rates Graph](image)

**Analysis**

The ideal rental vacancy rate for the housing market is between 6%-7% [Kasulis, 2016]. By this standard, Richland had the healthiest housing market by a significant margin. While all three cities saw a decrease in rental vacancy during this time, Richland was the only one whose market improved, as it reached 7.1% by 2015. Turlock had the lowest rate at 2.7% for 2015, while Twin Falls saw the greatest change during this time, dropping from 13.3% to 4.4%.
Implications & Questions

When we look at refugee resettlement nation-wide, our perspective changes considerably whether we focus on absolute numbers, the percentage of the overall population, or the proportion of the foreign-born population, and the same is true when we look at the city-scale across the US. Yet what is also true is that while some of the largest refugee resettling states - like Texas, California and Florida - are also home to some of the traditional immigrant-destination cities, when we look at the city scale we see that it is smaller cities in each of those states and across the country that are taking a significant and in some cases an increasing share of the approved refugee placements in the US. While the major metropolitan areas like San Diego, Phoenix, and Portland, OR still lead their states and the region in absolute numbers of resettlement, smaller cities like Richland, CA (1,138), Twin Falls, ID (1,500) and Turlock, CA (865) are also taking in fairly large numbers, and surpass many larger cities when factoring in city and foreign-born populations.

Similar to the Midwest, resettlement in the West was still primarily focused on the main metropolitan areas as mentioned above (i.e. Seattle in Washington, LA in California, Phoenix in Arizona). In many cases, we saw smaller cities within these metropolitan areas emerge as leaders, especially when factoring in city and foreign-born populations. Kent, WA a city of just over 125,000 in the heart of the Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan area, approved 5,055 compared to only 4,625 in Seattle. In California, while Sacramento approved more than 5,000 refugees in five years, its suburb of North Highlands approved a greater percentage of its population (2.34%) compared to only 1.09% in Sacramento. Smaller and mid-sized cities in more rural areas such as Spokane, WA (18.81%), Boise, ID (23.49%), and Salt Lake City, UT (18.20%) were taking in large percentages of their FBP, in contrast to areas such as southern California and the Bay Area, where there is much more of a history with migration.

When looking at the more local, city-scale of refugee resettlement in the US, several other questions thus come to mind:

- On what basis have smaller cities been chosen as refugee destinations? What is the policy or outcome goal behind such decisions? How does job and housing availability factor into deciding where refugees are placed within each state?
- Are there the necessary resources and social support programs in these smaller cities to help foster successful integration?
- What reasons might there be for the US resettlement system not to place refugees in larger, more traditional immigrant-destination metropolitan areas?
- What factors might "pull" refugees to smaller cities?
- What kinds of impacts have the increases in the share of overall or foreign-born populations suggested by refugee placements caused for the communities that welcome them? Have new community dynamics, tensions or opportunities emerged?
- Why is it that major cities in the West were still leading the way in absolute numbers of resettlement, while the Northeast saw cities such as Syracuse and Buffalo receiving more than traditional "gateway" cities like New York and Boston?
- What does the resettlement of a similar-sized group of refugees in a small city like Twin Falls, ID or Richland, WA look like compared to cities and towns within a larger metropolitan area?
- In the future, will we see resettlement trends in the West move more towards smaller cities as we are seeing in many places now, primarily in the Northeast?

Analyzing by municipality reveals more detailed patterns of resettlement within the Western United States. The largest metropolitan areas in the region still led their states, but there were also several smaller and mid-sized cities that approved in sizable numbers of refugees. When considering pre-existing foreign-born populations, resettlement sites outside of California and Arizona led the region. This speaks to the differing histories of migration among these states beyond their resettlement programs.

While it is impossible to directly correlate changes in rental vacancy, education, poverty, and unemployment rates to refugee resettlement between 2010 and 2015, analyzing such figures is useful in learning what kind of spaces refugees are moving into, and perhaps providing some insight into why resettlement offices are placing refugees in these sorts of areas and how this has affected, or not affected, the local community and economy.

References


