

VALLIANT NEWS

Study: Refugees contribute over \$200M in Metro Detroit

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November 20, 2019

West Bloomfield — A study released Tuesday shows the economic impact and contributions of refugees in southeast Michigan in the past decade was between \$230 million and \$295 million.

The study — by Global Detroit, an immigrant resource center in Midtown Detroit, and the University of Michigan's Ford School of Public Policy — showed where refugees from Iraq and Syria resettled in southeast Michigan, how much federal money was spent to settle them and how much they provide back to the economy and in what ways.

Ninety percent of refugee arrivals in Metro Detroit were Iraqi, who resettled over 10 years in Wayne, Washtenaw, Macomb and Oakland counties. During that same period, 7 percent of refugees were Syrians, the study's authors said Tuesday when they released the findings at the Chaldean Cultural Center in West Bloomfield.

According to U.S. State Department data, about 21,466 refugees resettled into the four counties between 2007-16.

The study found those refugees who have resettled in the last decade have contributed between \$229.6 million and \$295.3 million, with an estimated 2,311 jobs created.

“The data is needed to help people understand complex issues like refugee resettlement and public policy,” said Liz Gerber, professor and associate dean of the Ford School of Public Policy. “So much of the debate and conversation around the refugee topic is driven by bias, belief, assumption, and not facts.”

“For every dollar spent (by refugees) is more than a dollar of impact on the economy.”

In the works for two years, data was drawn from four resettlement agencies in southeast Michigan, the National Bureau of Economic Research, New American Economy, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and more.

The release of the study follows President Donald Trump's refugee admissions cap, the centerpiece of his policy agenda, announced Sept. 26. The administration will allow no more than 45,000 refugees into the United States next year, according to the , in what would be the lowest admissions level in more than a decade.

The resettlements occurred when Chaldeans, indigenous people of Iraq who speak a form of Aramaic and who are Christians, after they faced persecution in present-day Iraq. Southeast

Michigan is home to the world's largest Chaldean population outside Iraq, with about 150,000 people, more than 60 percent who own one or more businesses.

Oakland County has 53 percent of southeast Michigan's total number of refugees; Macomb County has 34 percent, Wayne County, 9 percent, and Washtenaw, 3 percent.

Mihaela Mitrofan, program manager for Samaritas refugee resettlement agency and a former immigrant from Romania, said the study shows what has been missing from the refugee debate.

"We need to humanize the refugee issue," Mitrofan said. "We must move away from the notion that accepting refugees threatens our security and recognize that refugees are the most thoroughly vetted that knock on the U.S. door. The screening process takes two to 10 years. Imagine building a life in a refugee camp. We prep them to be Americans to care for their children to someday become the next Steve Jobs."

Starting a new life in America was not easy for Yasir Ibrahim, who fled his war-torn hometown in Iraq in 2008 when he was 23. Ibrahim resettled in Sterling Heights and within a month after arriving at Samaritas, he learned English and was working as a dollar store clerk.

This year, he opened a restaurant and hired about 15 refugees.

"In May 2017, my dream come true," he said. "I opened a restaurant in Sterling Heights, the heart of the Iraqi-Chaldean community. I choose to open Casper Burger and Escalope because I could blend Arabic and Chaldean tradition with an American food."

The refugee study also found that:

- Southfield has the seventh highest refugee ratio of any U.S. city. Southfield has 4,429 Iraqi and 594 Syrian refugees. It reported a 77 percent drop in violent crime during a period when it received more than 4,000 new refugees, according to study partner New American Economy.
- Southfield, Sterling Heights, Troy, Warren and Madison Heights received the highest numbers of refugees during the decade — 14,463.
- Detroit hosted 2 percent of the refugees — 310 Iraqis and 20 Syrians, in the last 18 months.
- Zero refugees have been implicated in a fatal terrorist attack, according to the Cato Institute in an analysis of terrorist attacks on U.S. soil over the last 40 years.
- In 2015, refugees constituted 39 percent of Michigan's population when the state's population declined by 112,000 from 2006-16.
- Refugees were more likely to be entrepreneurs than those in the U.S.-born population.
- Refugee household incomes more than tripled in the 25 years after arrival, growing faster than immigrant groups. The median household income is \$67,000, \$14,000 more than the median U.S. income.

Steve Tobocman, director of Global Detroit, said Metro Detroit was on track to continue playing a prominent role in resettling refugees until Trump paused refugee resettlement.

“Last year, we resettled 500 refugees a month. However, in July and August of this year, the state has resettled less than 50 a month ... that’s the impact of the current administration.”

The study found that over time, from resettlement to learning English to finding jobs and starting their own businesses, “refugees really begin to find their own niche,” Tobocman said.

To Mitrofan and others, that brings cultural and economic value.

“They are not coming to steal your jobs, but rather make their own,” Mitrofan said. “These refugees we resettle are victims of terrorists. They are not terrorists themselves.”