

# Starting Anew

The Economic Impact of Refugees in America



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**Cover:** Image of Hem Raj, refugee from Bhutan turned restaurant entrepreneur in Akron, Ohio.

Photo Credit: Maddie McGarvey for the American Immigration Council

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# Executive Summary

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**A** record 100 million people around the globe were forced to flee their homes in 2022,<sup>1</sup> up from 65 million in 2015.<sup>2</sup> Of those displaced last year, 32.5 million were refugees who had to leave their country in fear of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or group membership.<sup>3</sup> While the United States set its refugee admissions target at 125,000 for 2023,<sup>4</sup> today's global crises are increasing the demand upon that number. In addition to regular refugee admissions, the United States has let in nearly 180,000 Afghans and Ukrainians through humanitarian parole since 2021.<sup>5</sup>

Political debates on how to handle recent refugees often focus on questions of humanitarian obligation or public safety concerns. While these are critical considerations, they fail to capture what many Americans experience as the most enduring legacy of refugees: the positive social and economic impact these newcomers have on their cities and towns.

Across the country, refugees have reshaped many communities in a fundamental way. In Fargo, North Dakota, large-scale employers like glass manufacturer Cardinal IG and rural health provider Sanford Health say they could not have successfully sustained and expanded operations in the region without the influx of refugee workers.<sup>6</sup> In Minneapolis, Somali refugees have become such an integral part of the city's business and cultural landscape that one now represents the area in the U.S. Congress. And in Buffalo, New York, the "refugee renaissance" has been credited with reversing decades of population decline and turning neighborhoods abandoned by the exodus of factory work into areas that are now safe and lively.<sup>7</sup> These are just a few examples of the very real ways in which refugees affect not just our society but also our local economy.

This report builds on the previous work published by New American Economy (now a part of the American Immigration Council)<sup>8</sup> and provides updated analyses of how recent refugees are contributing to the U.S. economy. Using the 5-year American Community Survey (ACS) from 2019, we identify a pool of nearly 2.4 million likely refugees based on their country of origin and year of arrival in the United States. This method is conservative in nature but provides us with a large and representative picture of the 3.5 million refugees who have arrived since 1975. The results our work produces are clear. Refugees pay tens of billions of dollars in taxes each year. And in a country where immigrants have long been known to be more likely than the U.S.-born to start businesses, refugees show a particular willingness to make such long-term investments in the country. They found companies, become U.S. citizens, and buy homes at notably high rates.

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*Refugees show a particular willingness to make long-term investments in the country.*

## KEY FINDINGS

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### ▶ **Refugees make significant contributions to our economy as **earners and taxpayers**.**

In 2019, the almost 2.4 million refugees captured in our analysis earned a collective \$93.6 billion in household income. They also contributed \$25 billion in taxes. That left them with \$68.6 billion in disposable income, or spending power, to use at U.S. businesses.

### ▶ **While refugees receive initial assistance upon arriving in the United States, they see particularly **sharp income increases** in subsequent years.**

While refugees here for five years or less have a median household income of roughly \$30,500, that figure rises in the following decades. By the time a refugee has been in the country for at least 20 years, their median household income reaches \$71,400—\$4,300 more than the median income of U.S. households overall.

### ▶ **Refugees have an **entrepreneurship rate** that outshines even that of other immigrants.**

The United States was home to nearly 188,000 refugee entrepreneurs in 2019. That means that 13 percent of refugees were entrepreneurs, compared to just 11.7 percent of non-refugee immigrants and 9 percent of the U.S.-born population. Refugee entrepreneurs also generated \$5.1 billion in business income that year.

### ▶ **Refugees make particularly meaningful contributions to the economies of **several large states**.**

In 17 U.S. states—including North Carolina, Michigan, and Massachusetts—the likely refugees in our sample hold more than \$1 billion in spending power. In California alone, their spending power totals more than \$20.7 billion, while in Texas the equivalent figure is more than \$5.4 billion.

### ▶ **Even more than other immigrants, refugees take steps to **lay down roots** and build lives in America.**

Of refugees who have been in the country for 20 years or more, 89.9 percent have become citizens, compared with 67.5 percent of other immigrants in the country that long. Additionally, 59.2 percent of all likely refugee households own their homes, compared with 51.7 percent of other immigrants. The homeownership rate for U.S.-born residents is 65.7 percent.

### ▶ **In an era when the country faces unprecedented demographic challenges, refugees are **uniquely positioned** to help.**

Recent estimates have indicated that by 2040, 21.6 percent of the U.S. population will be age 65 or older—up from 16 percent in 2019—while the 85 and older population doubles.<sup>9</sup> Refugees can help lessen the anticipated strain this will place on our workforce and entitlement programs. An estimated 78.2 percent of refugees are working-age, compared with 61.9 percent of the U.S.-born population.

This study provides insight into a small and often misunderstood segment of the foreign-born population. While much of the political rhetoric describes what refugees cost the United States in the first eight months of their stay—the short period when they receive government resettlement assistance—this report clearly demonstrates the strong upward trajectory experienced by many refugee families in the country long term.

It also echoes what many county executives and community leaders from places as varied as Fargo, North Dakota, to Utica, New York, have long said publicly: Rather than representing a drain, refugees bring a high rate of labor force participation and a spirit of entrepreneurship that helps to sustain their towns. Politicians have many factors to weigh when considering refugee policy. As this report makes clear, the economic argument for admitting refugees deserves recognition and consideration in serious policy debates as well.



# Introduction

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In 2016, a decade after founding Chobani, Hamdi Ulukaya—himself an immigrant—decided to formally help other American companies hire refugees, the people he credits with helping him turn his business into the number one Greek yogurt brand in the United States.<sup>10,11</sup>

The Tent Partnership for Refugees launched with a handful of U.S.-based companies which pledge to hire refugees. In exchange, Tent provides the resources and training needed to effectively hire a population that is eager to work but that may lack English proficiency, certain work skills, or transportation—all powerful barriers to employment.

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*Ulukaya's saying is: "Once a refugee gets a job, that's the moment they stop being a refugee."<sup>12</sup>*

Today, more than 175 companies in the United States and 300 companies globally have joined the Tent partnership.<sup>13</sup> In 2022 alone, 45 companies pledged to hire 22,000 refugees in the country over the next three years.<sup>14</sup> Among them: Amazon, Hilton, Marriott, Tyson, Hyatt, and the biopharmaceutical company Pfizer, which has hired refugees across the company in roles that

include scientific research, software engineering, cyber security, data analytics, and more.<sup>15</sup>

“We have seen a tremendous amount of interest in the past 18 months,” said Yaron Schwartz, Tent’s director for the United States.<sup>16</sup> Companies need talent and have been moved by humanitarian crises. They have also seen the evidence: Businesses surveyed by the Fiscal Policy Institute for a Tent study found that refugee employees had lower turnover rates across industries and U.S. regions, and that when refugee employees did leave positions it was often to take a step up or continue their education.<sup>17</sup>

“Refugees are very loyal to companies that take a chance on them and invest in creating a welcoming environment for them,” Schwartz said. “While there can be some initial upfront costs—to provide language or transportation support—those investments up top lead to long-term benefits for the company.”<sup>18</sup>

The same can be said for the country as a whole.

Refugees represent a small segment of the U.S. population—just 0.7 percent of all residents in the country overall—but they have made an outsized impact in the communities where they have settled, often small, rural towns facing decline and desperate for what local officials call a survival lifeline.<sup>19</sup>

Refugees help fill workforce gaps in healthcare and manufacturing, in service jobs and transportation. They start businesses at high rates, even compared with other immigrants. They buy homes where they can afford them, including in blighted areas in need of refresh. In this report, we look at the demographic, educational, and workforce characteristics of this group of new Americans to better see how refugees are helping to strengthen the U.S. economy.

To do this, we rely on an imputation method developed by the Council that identifies likely refugees in the American Community Survey microdata based on the year they arrived in the United States and their country of birth—a widely accepted approach that has appeared in other papers examining the refugee population.<sup>20</sup>

Using this method, we uncover what many people working with refugees have long known or suspected: Refugees contribute billions of dollars to our economy as taxpayers and consumers each year. Given that many are motivated to start anew after escaping war and conflict, they show a willingness to invest in their new homes, naturalizing and buying homes at high rates.

Most notably, however, they find a way to achieve the American dream. Starting off with relatively modest incomes, many experience an upward trajectory in household earnings in subsequent years.

While this report focuses on refugees, it is important to note that the success stories discussed here are relevant not only to refugee families, but to the broader economy as well.

PART II

# Earnings, Taxes, and Upward Mobility

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**T**his report looks at the contributions of refugees that have arrived in the country since the Second World War, the era when the United States first began accepting steady and significant numbers of refugees. Using ACS microdata, we isolate likely refugees by focusing on an individual's year of arrival in the United States and their country of birth. We then compare our overall numbers with refugee arrival data from the U.S. Department of State to determine which cases should be assigned "likely refugee" status. This allows us to capture large waves of refugees from countries like Somalia, Bosnia, and Syria. More details on our analysis can be found in the appendix.

It inevitably, however, misses some that come from countries that send a large number of migrants to the United States via other legal channels. One prominent example of this is Iran. Although Iranian refugees have arrived in the United States at a relatively steady rate since the Iranian Revolution (1978-1979), the country's long history of immigration to the United States means that refugees make up a small share of overall immigrant arrivals from that country each year. Therefore, aside from the years directly after the upheaval of the Iranian Revolution, when the flow of Iranian refugees was high, we exclude Iranians.

While not fully comprehensive, this method nevertheless produces a large sample that we believe is representative of the overall refugee population in the country. Since 1975, the country has accepted roughly 3.5 million refugees. The numbers in this report capture the experience and contributions of 2.4 million likely refugees. Even without the full population of refugees, however, we can see that they are making a large

economic impact. In 2019, the likely refugees we studied earned a collective \$93.6 billion in household income. They also contributed \$25 billion in taxes, including \$16.2 billion in federal taxes and \$8.7 billion in tax payments to state and local governments.

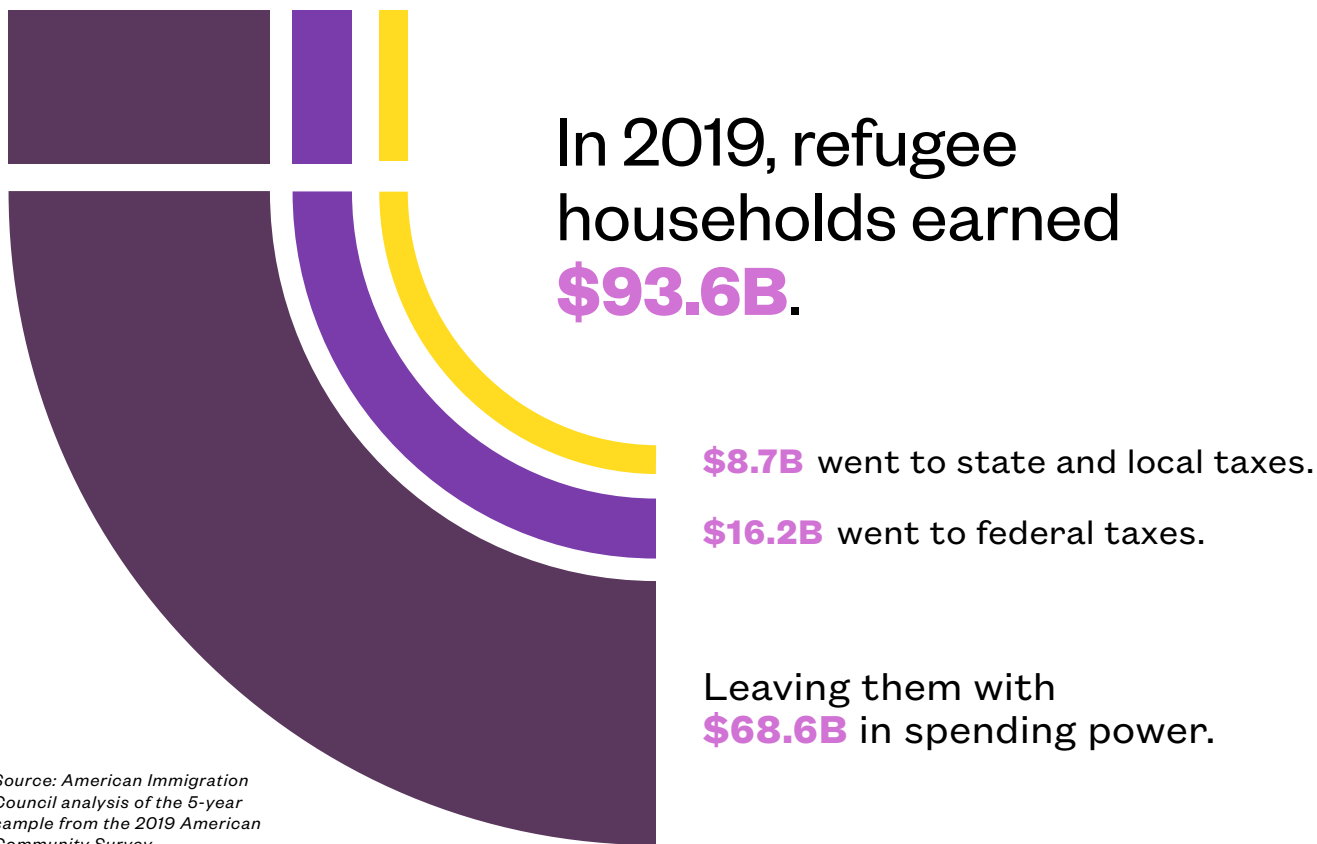
One important measure of how a given group contributes to the country's economy is the amount they spend each year as consumers. More than three out of every five U.S. jobs were in the service sector in 2021 according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it is critical for businesses to have access to a strong base of paying customers. Without a suitable number of shoppers, restaurant diners, and travelers, it is hard for many businesses in industries ranging from retail to hospitality to grow and thrive.

In this report, we shed light on the role that refugees play as consumers by looking at the "spending power" of this group. This measure, used frequently in Council research, refers to the discretionary income left over to households after deducting what they pay in federal, state, and local taxes.<sup>22</sup> Based on our analysis, the nearly 2.4 million likely refugees in our sample held \$68.6 billion of spending power in 2019. To put that figure in context, the amount is more than the annual state expenditure of all but 10 states<sup>23</sup> and enough to buy 2.3 million new cars.<sup>24</sup>

But while the aggregate contributions of refugees as earners, taxpayers, and consumers are impressive, one particularly notable thing stands out about the refugee community: their degree of upward mobility. While the median household income of refugees who have been in the country just five years or less was roughly \$30,500 in



FIGURE 1: REFUGEE EARNINGS AND TAX CONTRIBUTIONS, 2019



2019, for those who had been here more than 20 years, it stood at \$71,400— significantly higher than the \$67,100 median household income of the U.S. population overall (Figure 2).

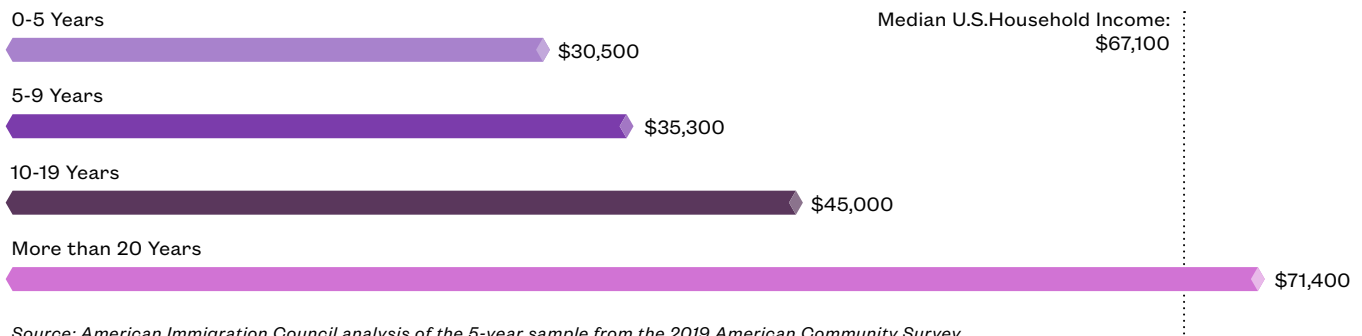
**SPOTLIGHT**

The killings and military attacks on ethnic minorities in Myanmar (Burma) have gone on for so long that a bottleneck of refugees—more than 90,000<sup>25</sup>—have formed in camps along the border in Thailand. The camps are as large as cities, but they are not cities: Residents cannot have jobs and they cannot leave.

“If you go outside, the soldier can jail you,” says Khu Stone, an ethnic Karen who lived in Mae La, a camp of over 40,000, after his village was burned. In fact, he was born in the camp, married there, and had his first child there. Life in the United States is his first taste of freedom.

At age 24, Stone was finally resettled in Omaha, Nebraska. At first, he hardly left the apartment, sick and anxious from the shock of it all. But within two months, he was working at Tyson as a trimmer, cutting the fat off beef for \$13.50 an hour plus benefits. “It was hard, because I have to stand eight hours a day and I never used a knife before,” he says.

FIGURE 2: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOMES OF REFUGEES, BY YEARS IN THE UNITED STATES, 2019



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey

*"We have no lines of U.S.-born Americans waiting to get into our plants"*

Six years later, Stone is still at Tyson, working as a food safety and quality assurance technician for \$23.63 per hour. His wife is in packaging earning \$19.25 per hour. He works mornings, and she nights. They hand off their youngest child at 3:00 p.m. in the parking lot.

Next year, he would like to go to school to become a pharmacy technician. Tyson will pay his tuition, even if it means he will leave the company. It is part of a large-scale investment Tyson is making to attract refugee workers, who now number about 8,000 across its 100-plus U.S. plants. Tyson provides English language classes, has on-site chaplains who act as social workers, helps with transportation, and pays for appointments, fees, and legal services needed to get naturalized. The retention rate doubles for workers who have become U.S. citizens.

"It's a difficult job, it's a cold job, it's a wet job. The industry averages a 30 percent annual turnover," says Garrett Dolan, a human resources manager who

oversees Tyson's legal assistance programs. "We have no lines of U.S.-born Americans waiting to get into our plants."

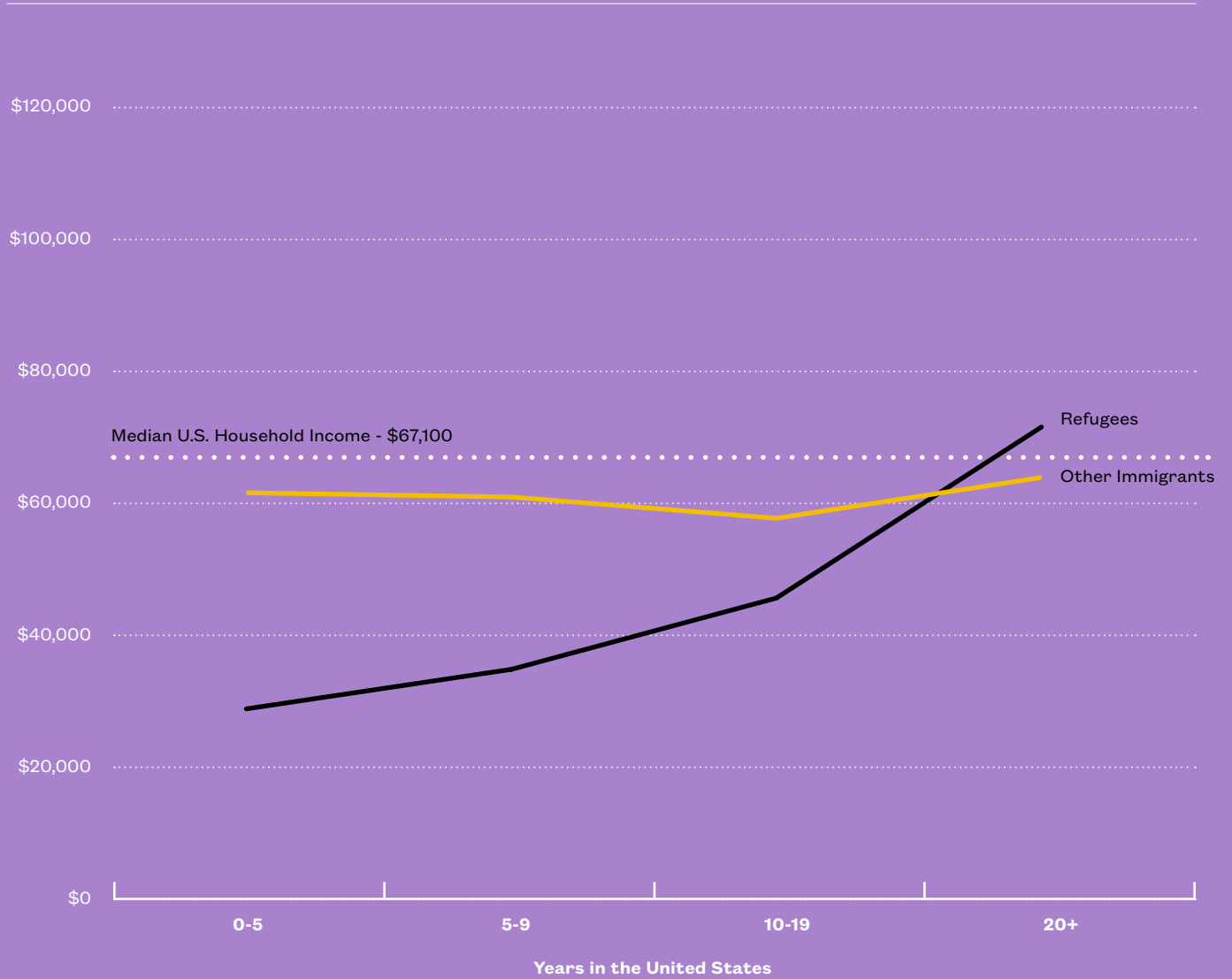
This year Tyson launched a program specifically for Afghan refugees, many of whom are still in the country on temporary status. Tyson hired about 1,000 Afghan refugees in 2022.

"They're great workers, but they come with a lack of clarity from the government about their ability to stay and their legal status," Dolan says. "We can't solve the problem for government, but we can make sure that our people have all their questions answered."<sup>26</sup>

As for Stone, he likes Tyson because the company "treats everyone equally," he says, and is very happy to be in America: "Because everybody in the U.S. has the opportunity to treat each other with respect."<sup>27</sup>

The income trajectory of refugees gains additional meaning when we consider it next to other comparable groups. Non-refugee immigrants who have been here less than five years have median household income of \$61,100. That figure increases more gradually, to \$63,300 for households led by immigrants that have been in the country for at least 20 years (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY LENGTH OF STAY IN THE UNITED STATES



	0-5 Years	5-9 Years	10-19 Years	More than 20 Years
<b>Refugees</b>	\$30,500	\$35,300	\$45,000	\$71,400
<b>Other Immigrants</b>	\$61,100	\$60,700	\$57,200	\$63,300

PART III

# Entrepreneurship

**R**efugees, by the nature of their experience, are often forced to become resourceful. Families from Bhutan or Burma—who often have spent years in refugee camps—frequently find creative ways to eke out a living in an informal economy. In many cases this is done by selling goods or services to their fellow refugees. In one recent report, researchers from the World Economic Forum looked at this dynamic in several of the refugee camps in Jordan for refugees from the ongoing Syrian conflict. They found in one camp alone there were more than 3,000 Syrian-run businesses. A street cutting through the camp, nicknamed Champs Elysees, was chockablock with stalls selling bicycles, falafel, furniture, household appliances, and bread.<sup>28</sup>

Our research indicates that once refugees arrive in the United States, they continue to display particularly high levels of entrepreneurship. In 2019, the country was home to almost 188,000 refugee entrepreneurs, a group that brought in \$5.1 billion in business income. While that number alone is notable, what is more telling is how the rate of entrepreneurship among refugees differs from immigrants overall—a group already known to play an outsize role in founding new businesses. In 2019, 13 percent of refugees were entrepreneurs. The equivalent figure for non-refugee immigrants was 11.7 percent—still significantly above the 9 percent entrepreneurship rate for the U.S.-born population that year (Figure 4).

The high entrepreneurship rate of refugees gains more meaning when viewed in context. Entrepreneurship has always been critical to the health of our economy. Small companies and young companies consistently show net job growth—meaning that even after accounting for job losses of failing startups, new businesses still add jobs to the economy.<sup>29</sup>

In our analysis, we find that refugee entrepreneurs contribute to a wide range of sectors. In 2019, the most common industry for self-employed refugees was what the Census refers to as general services or “other services”—a wide range of customer-serving fields that includes dry cleaning, automotive services, appliance repair, and hairdressing. That year almost 45,000 refugee entrepreneurs—or 24 percent of the total—had businesses operating in that industry.

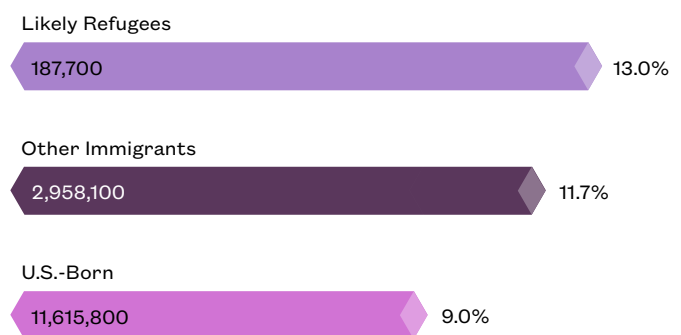
**188,000**

Number of Refugee Entrepreneurs

**\$5.1B**

Total Business Income of Refugee Entrepreneurs

FIGURE 4: ENTREPRENEURSHIP RATES OF REFUGEES AND OTHER GROUPS, 2019

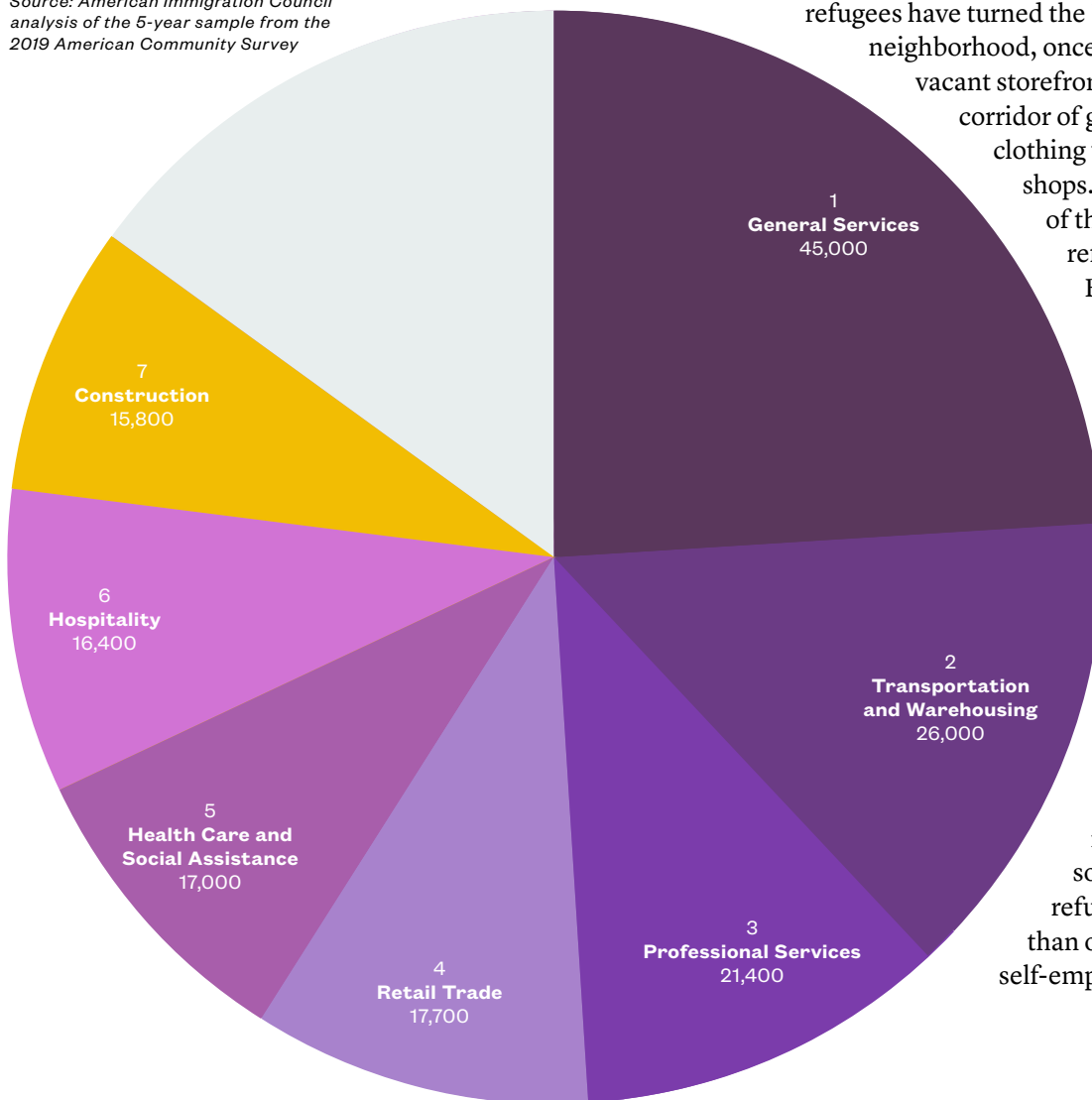


Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey

**FIGURE 5: DISTRIBUTION OF REFUGEE ENTREPRENEURS, BY INDUSTRY, 2019**

1	General Services	<b>45,000</b>	<b>24.0%</b>
2	Transportation and Warehousing	<b>26,000</b>	<b>13.9%</b>
3	Professional Services	<b>21,400</b>	<b>11.4%</b>
4	Retail Trade	<b>17,700</b>	<b>9.5%</b>
5	Health Care and Social Assistance	<b>17,000</b>	<b>9.1%</b>
6	Hospitality	<b>16,400</b>	<b>8.7%</b>
7	Construction	<b>15,800</b>	<b>8.4%</b>

Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey



The second most common sector among self-employed refugees was transportation and warehousing—the sector that includes truck drivers and warehouse labor, both occupations that have struggled to find workers in recent years and expect to see continued job growth.<sup>30</sup> More than 26,000 refugees had businesses in that field. We show the other top industries where refugee entrepreneurs are represented in Figure 5.

The notion of refugees helping to revitalize Main Street is one that is reflected anecdotally in many communities.

In Akron, Ohio, for example, Bhutanese and Burmese refugees have turned the North Hill neighborhood, once pockmarked with vacant storefronts, into a bustling corridor of grocery stores, clothing vendors, and jewelry shops.<sup>31</sup> In St. Louis, tens of thousands of Bosnian refugees have settled in Bevo Mill, a section of the city once known for its high crime and near ghost-town status.<sup>32</sup> Today, Little Bosnia, as it is known, is home to many popular restaurants, bars, cafes, and specialty food shops owned by Bosnians.<sup>33</sup> In Garden Grove, California, a city roughly 30 minutes south of Los Angeles, refugees made up more than one out of every five self-employed workers.<sup>34</sup>

Pablo Bose, a geography professor at University of Vermont, studies refugee resettlements. He asked hundreds of local officials from every state in the country about the benefits of new refugees to their communities. The most-cited answers were increased diversity, urban renewal, and survival. “Many of these people—mayors, city councilors, city planners—described refugees as being a lifeblood for their towns ... as a literal renewal,” he said.<sup>35</sup>

Refugees who opt to be entrepreneurs are also considerably more likely than the U.S.-born—or even other immigrants—to gravitate toward certain key

industries. For example, the refugees in our sample were more than three times as likely as U.S.-born entrepreneurs to have businesses in the transportation and warehousing industry, one of the fastest growing industries for employment in the country with more than 6 million American workers in 2021 and 6.6 million expected by 2031.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, refugee entrepreneurs were twice as likely to start businesses in general services, another fast-growing industry that’s expected to employ more than 6.6 million Americans by 2031.<sup>37</sup>

**FIGURE 6: TOP INDUSTRIES FOR REFUGEE ENTREPRENEURS, 2019**

	Share of All Refugee Entrepreneurs	Share of All U.S.-born Entrepreneurs	How Much More Likely Are Self-Employed Refugees to Be in This Industry?
<b>General Services</b>	24.0%	12.0%	<b>2.0x</b>
<b>Transportation and Warehousing</b>	13.9%	4.2%	<b>3.3x</b>
<b>Hospitality</b>	8.7%	6.5%	<b>1.3x</b>
<b>Health Care and Social Assistance</b>	9.1%	8.5%	<b>1.1x</b>

*Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey*



## PART IV

# Impact on States

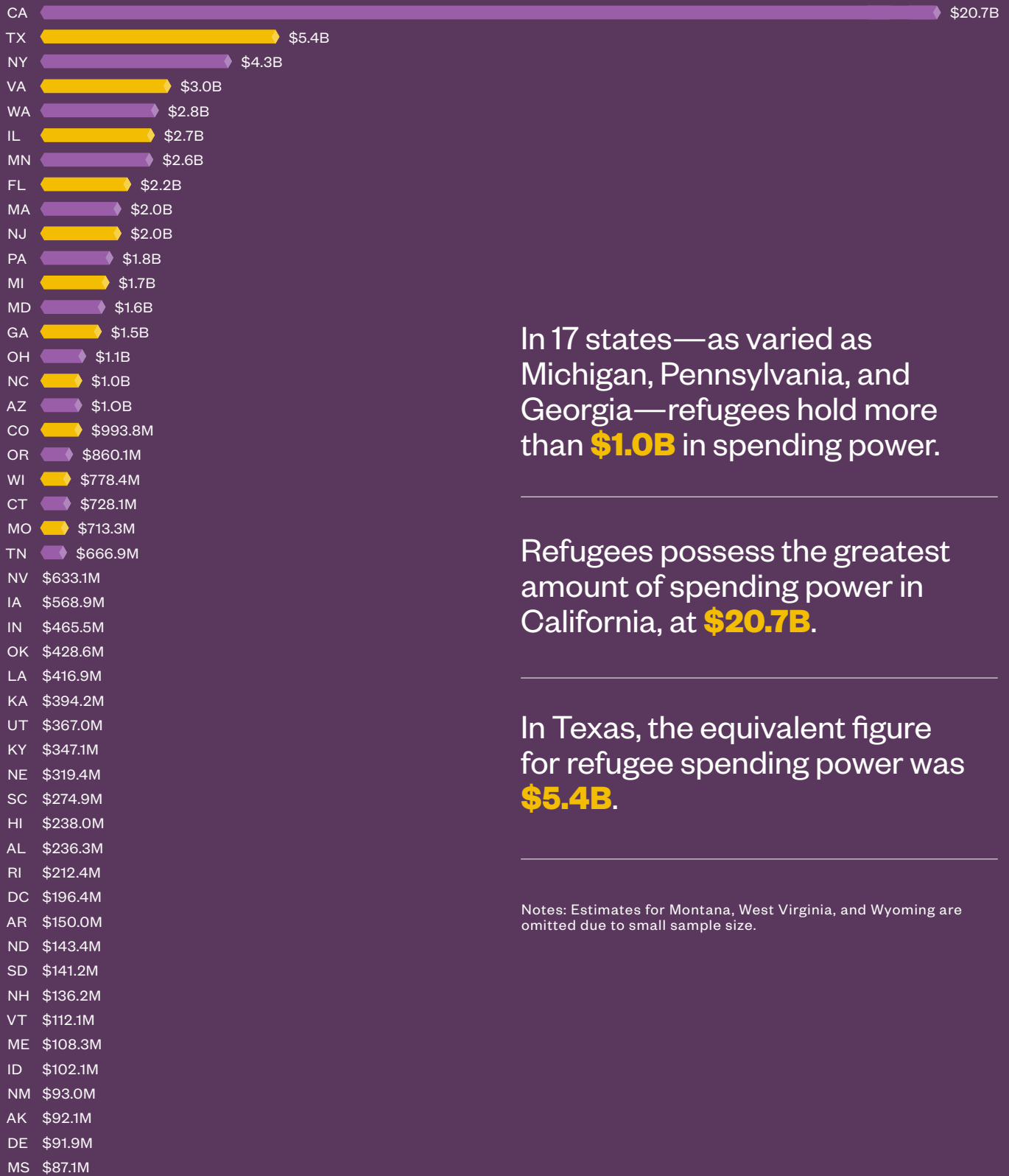
To fully understand the impact refugees are having on the economy, it is important to look not just at the national picture, but at data for individual states as well. Our sample of nearly 2.4 million likely refugees includes individuals based in every state. Some states, however, have particularly large refugee populations. More than one out of every four likely refugees in our sample, for instance, are in California. Seven other states—Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Texas, Virginia, and Washington—have likely refugee populations of more than 80,000 people.

In Figure 8, we show the spending power held by refugees in 47 states. States that had a high margin of error due to the small number of likely refugees there are omitted. The consumer power of refugees is highest in California, a state where refugees held \$20.7 billion in spending power in 2019. In Texas, the equivalent figure was \$5.4 billion. Although those two large states rank first and second on that metric, they are hardly the only places where refugees hold considerable clout as consumers. In 17 states—including places as varied as Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Georgia—refugees had the spending power of more than \$1 billion in 2019.

FIGURE 7: STATES WITH HIGHEST SHARES OF REFUGEES AMONG FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS, 2019

	State	# of Refugees	Refugee Share of Foreign-Born Population	Refugee Share of Overall Population
1	Minnesota	119,600	25.5%	2.1%
2	South Dakota	6,300	19.9%	0.7%
3	Iowa	27,400	16.7%	0.9%
4	North Dakota	4,900	16.4%	0.7%
5	Vermont	4,100	14.9%	0.7%
6	Nebraska	18,800	13.4%	1.0%
7	Maine	6,300	13.2%	0.5%
8	Michigan	84,200	12.3%	0.8%
9	Missouri	28,900	11.3%	0.5%
10	Wisconsin	32,200	11.1%	0.6%

FIGURE 8: SPENDING POWER OF REFUGEES, BY STATE, 2019



In 17 states—as varied as Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Georgia—refugees hold more than **\$1.0B** in spending power.

Refugees possess the greatest amount of spending power in California, at **\$20.7B**.

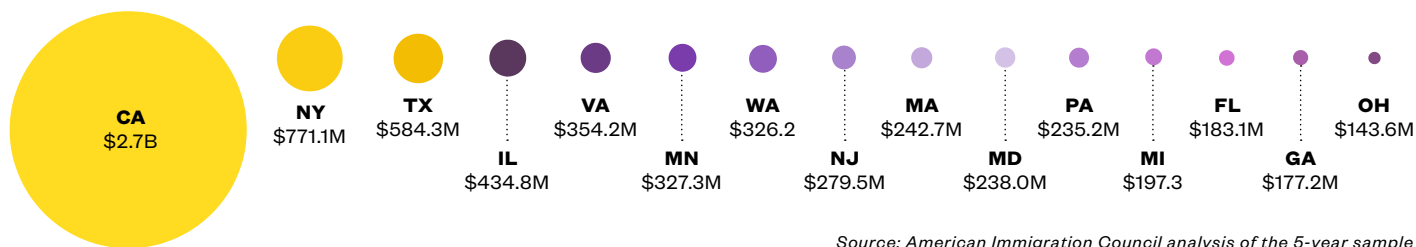
In Texas, the equivalent figure for refugee spending power was **\$5.4B**.

Notes: Estimates for Montana, West Virginia, and Wyoming are omitted due to small sample size.

Refugees, of course, also play a role at the state level as both earners and taxpayers. In 21 states, they paid more than \$100 million in combined state and local taxes in 2019, and in 11 of those states they paid more than \$200 million—see Figure 9. In an era of tightening budgets, these payments were meaningful contributions to public funding for local services.

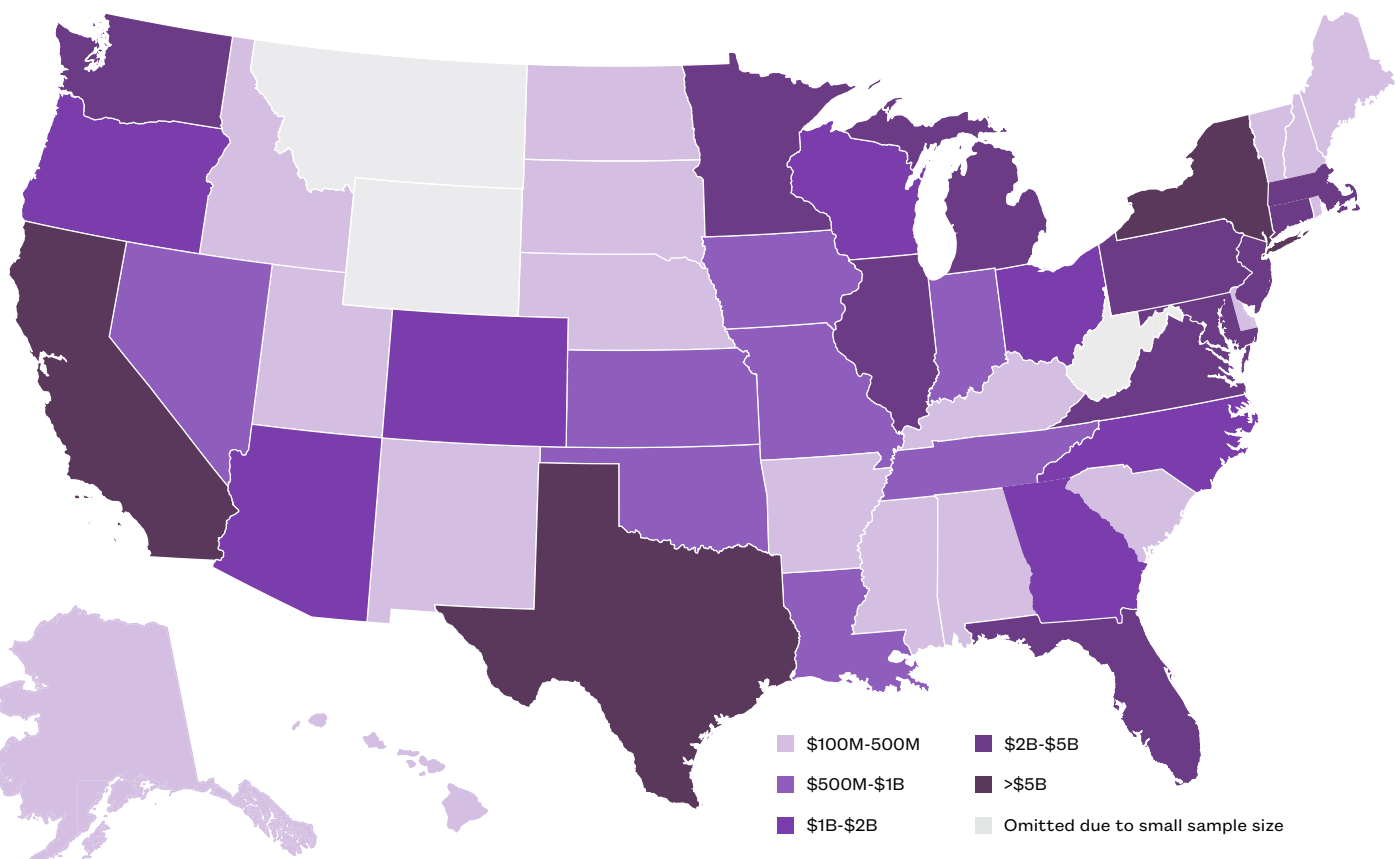
When President Trump issued an executive order in 2019 requiring states and towns to opt in if they wanted to resettle refugees, 42 states and more than 100 mayors opted in. The governor of Utah even asked for an increase in refugees to be resettled in the state.<sup>38</sup>

**FIGURE 9: STATES WHERE REFUGEES CONTRIBUTED THE MOST IN STATE AND LOCAL TAX REVENUE, 2019**



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey

**FIGURE 10: HOUSEHOLD INCOME OF LIKELY REFUGEE HOUSEHOLDS, BY STATE, 2015**



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey

PART V

# Laying Down Roots

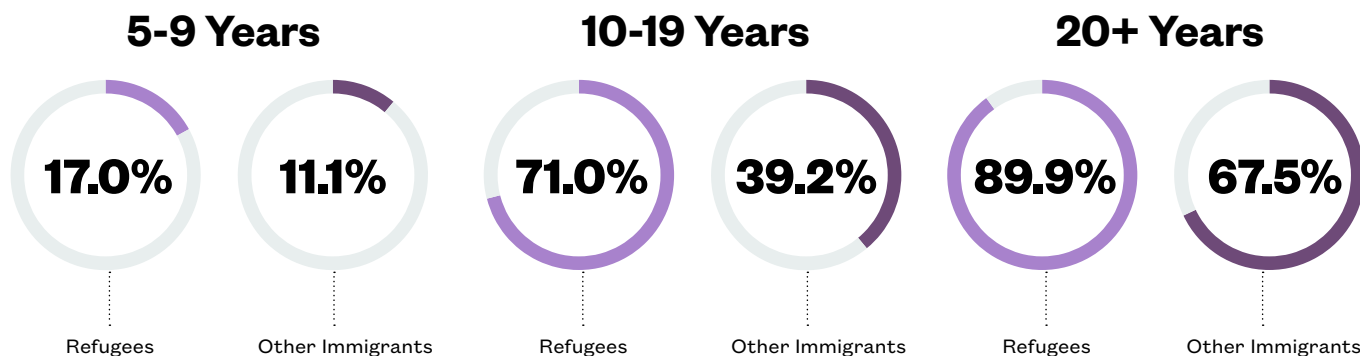
**B**ecause they have escaped dangerous situations back home, refugees are particularly motivated to move beyond the place they came from and embrace their new communities. This phenomenon is demonstrated clearly in our data. Refugees who have been in the country for 10 or more years naturalize at particularly high rates. In 2019, 9 out of 10 refugees who had been in the country for 20 years or more had become U.S. citizens. The equivalent figure for non-refugee immigrants was 7 out of 10. A similar pattern holds for refugees here for 10-19 years, as is demonstrated below.

Laying down long-term roots in the United States is evident in other behaviors as well. Refugee households, for instance, tend to have particularly high levels of home

ownership, a feature regarded to promote wealth and social stability.<sup>39</sup> In 2019, 59.2 percent of households led by refugees—more than 633,000 households in total—owned their homes. More impressively, more than one of every five (21.4 percent) households led by likely refugees owned their homes outright without any outstanding liens or mortgages. The overall homeownership among the refugee population was higher than it was for other immigrants, 51.7 percent of whom owned their homes. While refugees came closer, both groups had somewhat lower homeownership rates than the U.S.-born population overall (Figure 12).

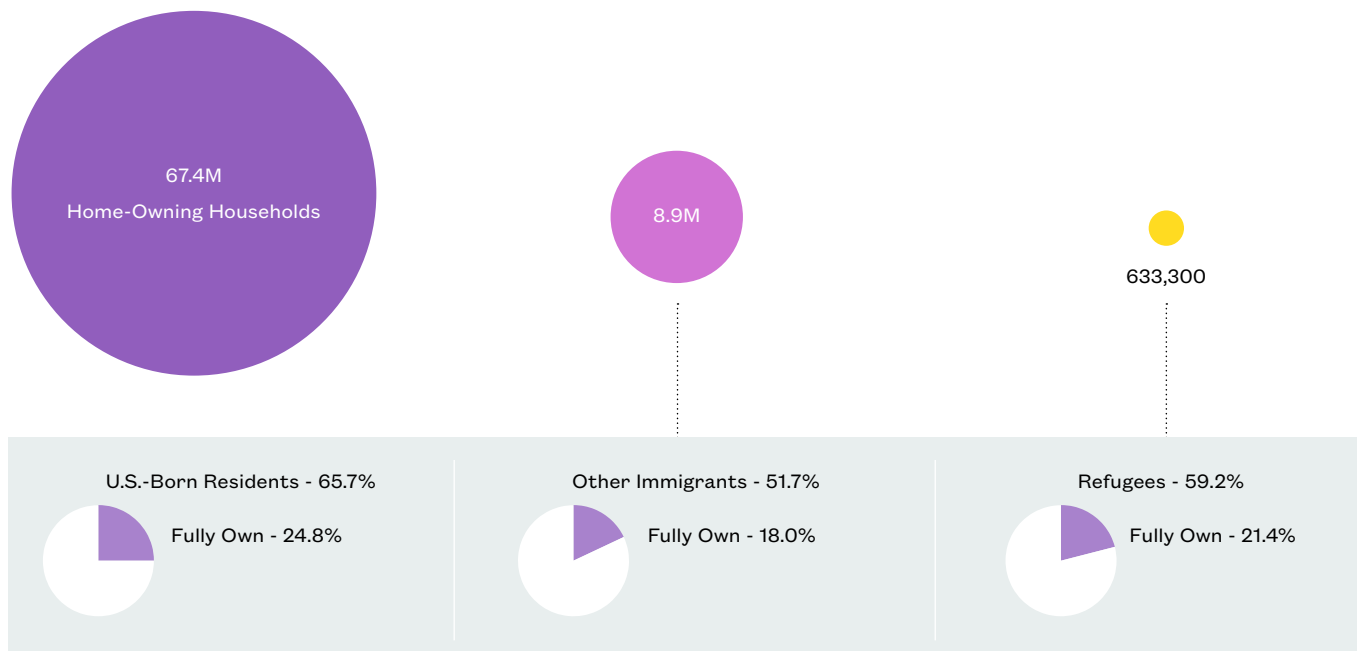
Both homeownership and citizenship have important economic implications. Because citizenship allows

FIGURE 11: NATURALIZATION RATES OF REFUGEES AND OTHER IMMIGRANTS, BASED ON YEARS IN THE UNITED STATES, 2019



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey

FIGURE 12: HOMEOWNERSHIP RATES OF REFUGEES AND OTHER GROUPS, 2019



immigrants to pursue a greater range of positions, including public and private sector jobs requiring a security clearance, it has been found to raise a person’s annual wages. One study by the Migration Policy Institute found that even after accounting for other factors that might motivate citizenship, naturalized citizens had higher employment rates, higher earnings, and weathered financial crises better than those who were not able to gain citizenship.<sup>40</sup>

And because immigrants in general—and particularly refugees—tend to move into areas that have fallen out of favor, their home buying can regenerate neighborhood wealth and help reverse social problems caused by blight.

## SPOTLIGHT

It is called the most ethnically diverse square mile in America. The Ellis Island of the South. A place where police carry the number for a phone service with interpreters in 170 languages. The place is Clarkston, Georgia, a former whistle stop on the Georgia Railroad

that has served as the first American home to some 60,000 refugees from dozens of countries since the 1970s.<sup>41</sup> “In Clarkston, we can see the whole world in a small city,” Malek Alarmash, a Syrian refugee, observed in *The Bitter Southerner*.<sup>42</sup>

Located 11 miles from downtown Atlanta, Clarkston became one of Atlanta’s first suburbs, home to mostly middle-class white people who could own goats while easily reaching downtown by streetcar. But Atlanta’s growth and the white flight of the 1970s reshaped the town, and in the 1990s it was pegged by refugee resettlement agencies for its affordable apartment complexes and good public transit.

Refugee resettlement agencies want to set up newcomers for success, so they choose sites carefully. Clarkston, also a one-hour van ride from poultry processing plants that provide entry level work, has proven successful. While many refugees move on to other cities or towns after their first year—when aid is linked to their resettlement site—others stay.

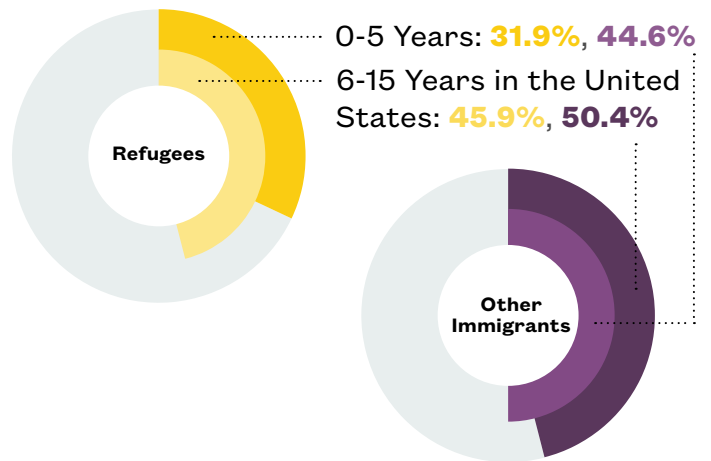
Today more than half of the town’s 14,500 residents are foreign-born.<sup>43</sup> Occupancy rates are high. Crime and unemployment rates are low. Neighborhoods are a mosaic of ethnic grocers and restaurants, of temples, churches and mosques. Delegations from European towns visit to learn how Clarkston has created such an integrated, welcoming community.<sup>44</sup> And according to former Mayor Ted Terry, the town is now even attracting young, middle-class professionals from Atlanta—U.S.-born Americans in search of affordable housing “and all the trappings of diversity.”<sup>45</sup>

Aside from buying homes, refugees often take another important step that can be helpful for long-term integration: They learn the English language. While only 31.9 percent of refugees in the country no more than five years speak English very well or exclusively, 45.9 percent of those here for 6 to 15 years speak at that level. That jump is larger than the one experienced by other immigrants. (Figure 13).

This has important economic implications as well. Past research has found that having poor English language skills is a particularly strong factor leading to immigrant underemployment. For instance, a previous report by the Council, the Migration Policy Institute, and World Education Services found that college-educated immigrants who spoke English “not well” or “not at all” were five times more likely to hold jobs that didn’t require a bachelor’s degree than those who spoke English fluently after controlling for other factors.<sup>46</sup>

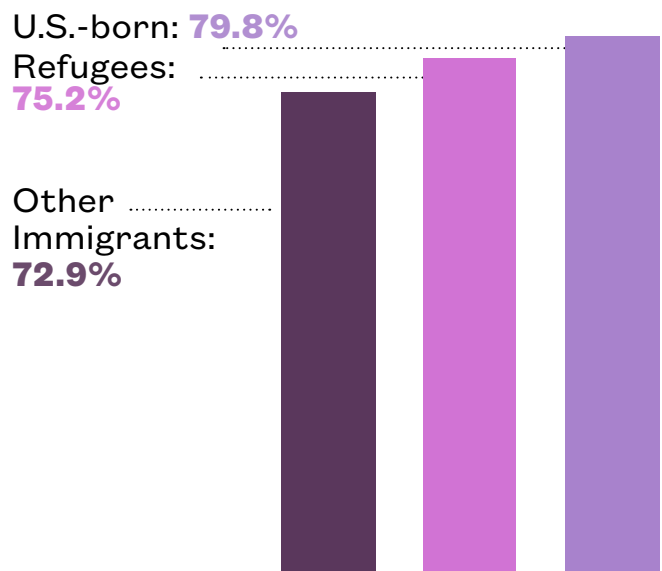
Refugees who are eligible also vote at relatively high rates, exercising what many consider an important civic duty. In the 2020 presidential election, more than 899,000 refugees cast ballots, or 75.2 percent of eligible refugee voters. The voting participation rate was slightly higher than the participation rate of immigrants who came to the country via other channels. (Figure 14).

FIGURE 13: SHARE OF REFUGEES AND OTHER IMMIGRANTS PROFICIENT IN ENGLISH, BY YEARS IN THE UNITED STATES



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey

FIGURE 14: VOTER PARTICIPATION RATES AMONG REFUGEES AND OTHER POPULATION GROUPS, 2020



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 2020 November Voter Supplements of the Current Population Survey



PART VI

# Demographics and Contributions to the Workforce

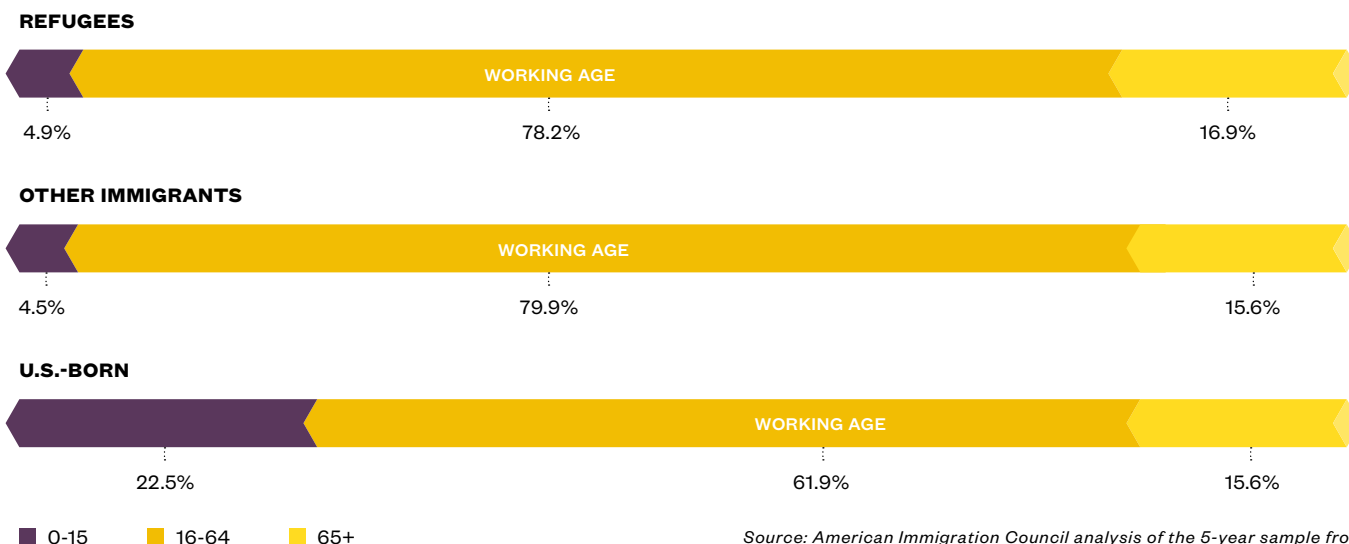
The demographics of the refugee population demonstrate why they are uniquely positioned to contribute to the U.S. economy. The refugees in our sample are overwhelmingly of working age. In 2019, more than 3 of every 4 refugees in the country were between the ages of 16 and 64, compared with about 3 in 5 of the U.S.-born population.

That disparity is important given the aging crisis that will face the United States in the coming years. The aging of the baby boom generation could lead to more than a 50 percent increase by 2030 in the number of Americans

aged 65 and older who require nursing home care, to 1.9 million.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, due to the aging of the population, the United States expects to see a decline in the labor force through at least 2031.<sup>48</sup>

As the share of older Americans increases, so too will the burden on social programs. The share of Social Security and Medicare expenditures is projected to increase from 8.7 percent of U.S. gross domestic product in 2019<sup>49</sup> to 11.8 percent by 2050.<sup>50</sup> Immigrants in general have long been pointed to as one way the country can gain a crucial source of younger workers to counter the strain

FIGURE 15: AGE BREAKDOWNS OF REFUGEES AND OTHER GROUPS, 2019



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey

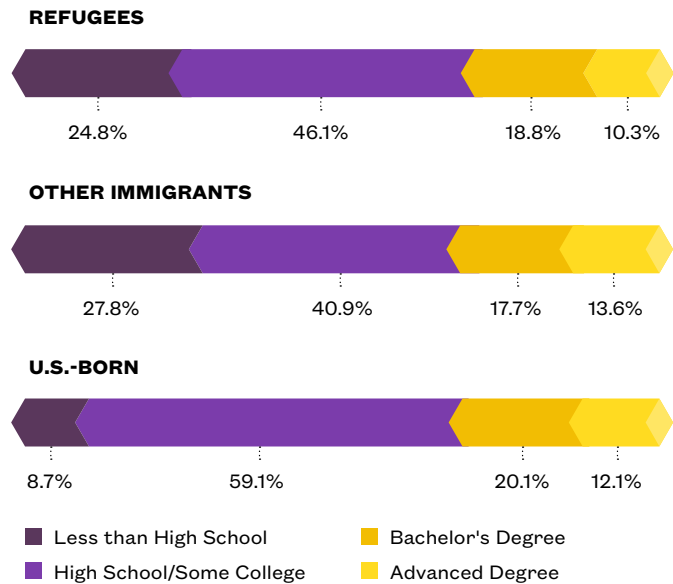
this will place on our workforce and tax base. We find that refugees in particular are an important part of that strategy. While 78.2 percent of likely refugees were working age in 2019, the equivalent figure for the U.S.-born was 61.9 percent. (See Figure 15.)

*"We have employers calling us all the time saying, 'Do you have nurses? Do you have nursing assistants that you can send us?'"*

Our data also demonstrates some of the real challenges that refugees face. Compared to some other immigrant groups, they are less likely to boast high levels of education. In 2019, 29.1 percent of refugees older than 25 had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 32.2 percent of the equivalent U.S.-born population. They also, unlike the foreign-born population as a whole, are less likely than the U.S.-born to have a graduate degree. In many ways, this is not surprising given that many refugees have lived through displacement and war or have grown up in refugee camps with little access to higher education. This reality makes the large contributions that refugees make to our economy—as both entrepreneurs and earners—all the more notable.

The refugees represented in our sample also contribute to a wide variety of industries, some of which have real needs for additional workers. Refugees are more than twice as likely as U.S.-born workers to hold jobs in general

**FIGURE 16: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT LEVEL OF REFUGEES AND OTHER POPULATION GROUPS, AGES 25+, 2019**



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey

or “other services”—a sector that includes a variety of service roles such as dry cleaning, housekeeping, or machine repair. In 2019, 9.5 percent of refugee workers held jobs in that industry, compared to 4.6 percent of all U.S.-born workers. Similarly, refugees gravitated in high numbers toward healthcare, an industry where over one out of every seven refugees worked.

A shortage of healthcare workers is already being called a national emergency<sup>51</sup> that is contributing to a decrease in the quality of care and greater risks to patient safety.<sup>52</sup> The situation is projected to get much worse without an injection of new workers.

The country faces a shortage of up to 124,000 physicians by 2034<sup>53</sup> and up to 450,000 nurses—a 20 percent shortage—as soon as 2025.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, an early analysis by the Council found that the number of jobs for home health and personal care aides will increase by 25.4 percent between 2021 and 2031 to 4.6 million, the largest increase of any job in the economy, while the number of

working-age Americans will increase by only 0.3 percent a year through 2035—and only because of arriving immigrants and their children.<sup>55</sup>

“We have employers calling us all the time saying, ‘Do you have nurses? Do you have nursing assistants that you can send us?’” said Brooke Anttila-Escoto, medical career advancement manager for the International Institute of Minnesota, which trains refugee and immigrant healthcare workers. “Our clients are filling open positions, and filling them with really highly skilled, caring people.”

“Without new Americans filling this role we would really be in bad shape. We don't have enough graduates from nursing programs to fill the shortage. There aren't enough nursing instructors teaching. It's bad, but it's better than it would be without their expertise filling this role.”<sup>56</sup>

## SPOTLIGHT

*“I just remember if I had to walk, I walk. If I had to run, I run.”*

Esther Chin has always known fear and violence. She is from Chin, a state in Myanmar (Burma) whose people have been persecuted for decades. She was at particular risk: Her father had spoken against the government. Not publicly, “he did not take action,” she says. “But in Burma you cannot be honest with your thoughts, especially with the military.”

One day in January of 2004, when she was 15, soldiers began shooting people on the streets. Her teacher grabbed his class and fled into the jungle, where they hid, ran, walked, and took buses for 82 days before reaching safety 1,500 miles away in Panang, Malaysia. She would not see her mother for six months.

“I don't remember a lot,” she says. “I just remember if I had to walk, I walk. If I had to run, I run.”

For the next seven years, school would be a memory. In Kuala Lumpur, Chin went to the refugee office every day at 4:30 a.m. to stand in line with the other girls. The boys and teacher worked. Together they rented a single room with a bath and a kitchen.

After three months, they received refugee cards, affording some protection when arrested for illegal residency. Chin went to work, first as a dishwasher and then as a retail clerk. In 2011, one year after receiving immigration interviews, Chin's family was resettled in Salt Lake City, Utah. They arrived in January, penniless in flip flops and tank tops, with no English skills.

Because Chin's siblings worked, and with help from One Refugee—a nonprofit that helps refugees earn college degrees and find employment—Chin could attend school. She took English classes, finished high school, and graduated college, often while working jobs and always lugging three language dictionaries to class. “I knew that I needed to keep pushing,” she says.

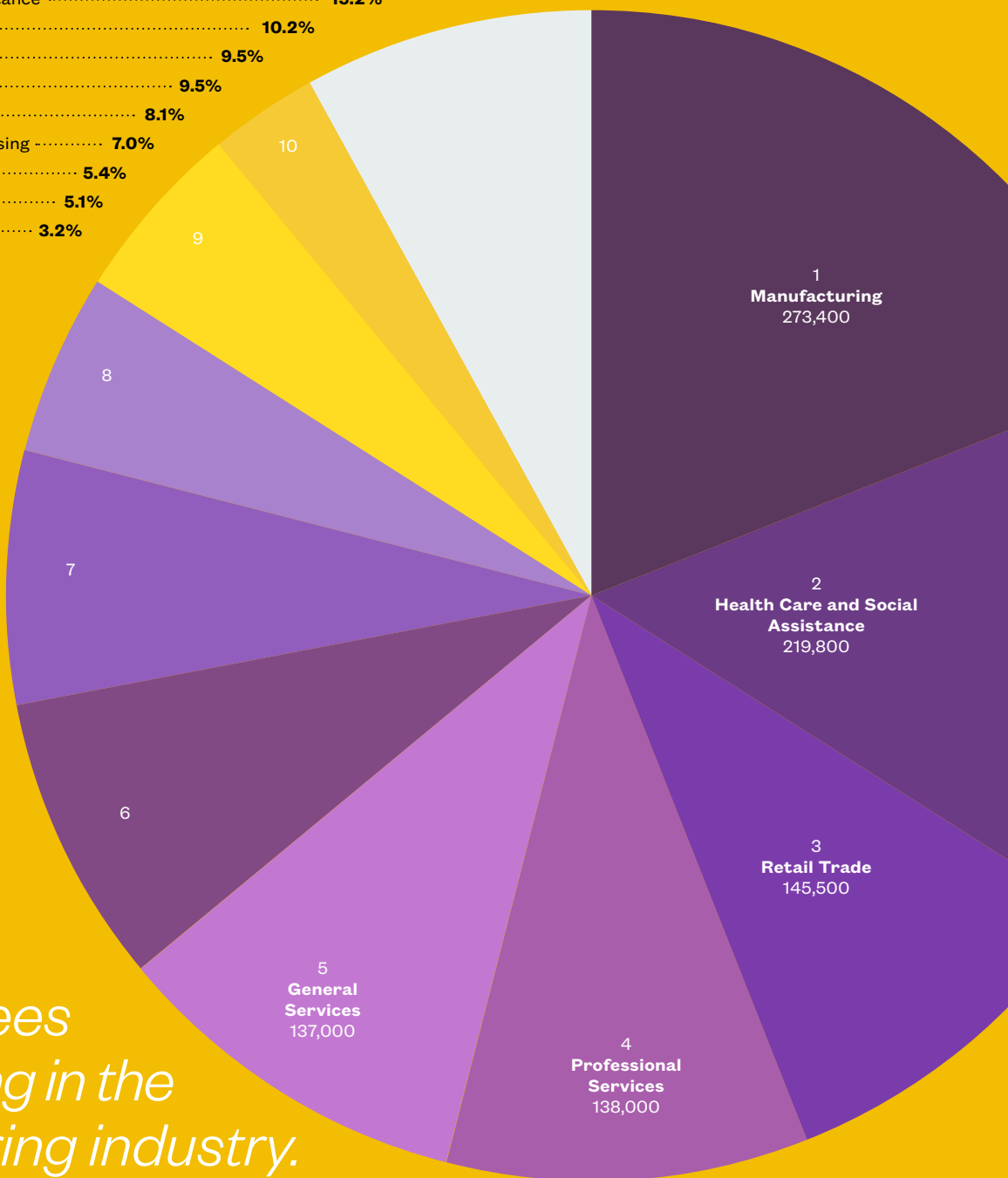
In 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Chin received her bachelor's degree in nursing and immediately went to work as a traveling COVID nurse, risking her own life to help patients in the hardest-hit hospitals across the United States.

“There are a lot of refugees like me. We want to study, we want to work,” she says. “With more organizations like One Refugee, we refugees can do better. We just need a chance.”<sup>57</sup>

Where refugees appear to make the biggest mark is in the manufacturing sector. In 2019, nearly 1 in 5 refugee workers, or 18.9 percent, were employed in the manufacturing industry. This meant the sector employed more than 273,000 refugees that year. Many of the refugees who come to America with little work experience fill jobs that may hold less appeal to U.S.-born workers. This can include positions in rural areas or in fields such as meatpacking or poultry processing. Because refugees tend to be stable employees, staying in roles for years at a time,<sup>58</sup> their presence can help an employer with hard-to-fill jobs remain viable.

FIGURE 17: TOP 10 INDUSTRIES FOR REFUGEE WORKERS, 2019

1	Manufacturing	18.9%
2	Health Care and Social Assistance	15.2%
3	Retail Trade	10.2%
4	Professional Services	9.5%
5	General Services	9.5%
6	Hospitality	8.1%
7	Transportation and Warehousing	7.0%
8	Finance	5.4%
9	Education	5.1%
10	Public Administration	3.2%



*In 2019, nearly 1 in 5 refugees were working in the manufacturing industry.*

PART VII

# Underemployed

**E**ven more so than other immigrants, refugees tend to be underemployed, meaning that they work in jobs that do not take advantage of their skills or education. In 2019, the share of refugees in the workforce who had a college degree but worked in a position that did not require such a degree was 36.2 percent, more than other immigrants and well above the 30.5 percent rate for the U.S.-born. Earlier research found that this untapped talent, or “brain waste,” costs the United States an estimated \$10 billion in tax payments due to lower earnings.<sup>59</sup>

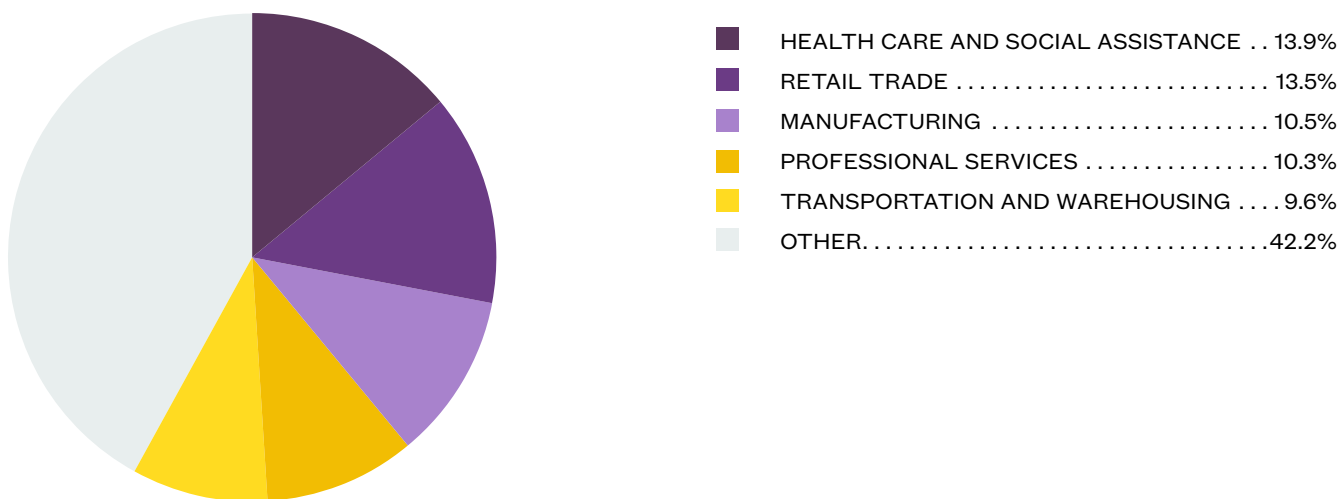
Among refugees, this brain waste is most pronounced in the healthcare field, where strict licensing requirements make it difficult for professionals who were trained in another country to practice in the United States.

FIGURE 18: SHARE OF UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS, 2019



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey

FIGURE 19: SHARE OF UNDEREMPLOYED REFUGEE WORKERS, BY INDUSTRY, 2019



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey

## PART VIII

# STEM

Recent research from the Council shows the critical role that immigrant workers play in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, jobs that American businesses have an increasingly difficult time filling. While immigrants accounted for 17 percent of the total U.S. labor force in 2019,<sup>60</sup> they accounted for almost one-fourth, or 23.1 percent, of all STEM workers.<sup>61</sup> The trend appears to be even more highlighted among refugees, where 5.6 percent of the workforce is in STEM fields, twice the rate of the U.S.-born.

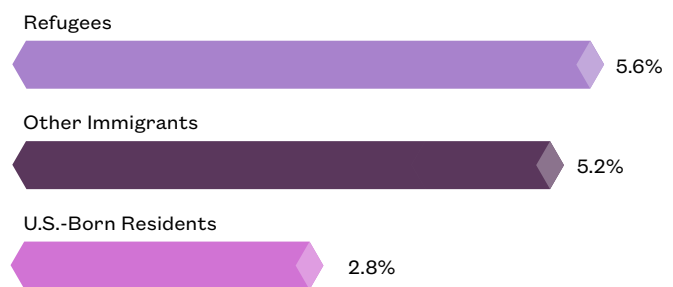
## SPOTLIGHT

Danny Abedi has his mother's face, long and thin. In the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998, these features, considered characteristic of the Tutsi people, were enough to get people killed as factions reignited the ethnic violence of the Rwandan genocide. The Second Congo War would come to be known as the Great War of Africa and result in the deaths of 5.4 million people.

Before that time, Abedi's family was doing well. Both his parents were successful business owners. His father traveled frequently. "We could afford pretty much everything," he says. But in 1999, the civil war reached their town. They moved to another town. War followed. They fled to Burundi. But there, too, rebels soon searched homes for Tutsi look-alike Congolese to kill. Abedi's family hid behind the furniture in a neighbor's house for two days, then fled again.

Abedi, then about 8, remembers one thing vividly: running. His little sister was on his mom's back. His little brother was on his dad's shoulders. He was holding his father's hand. And they were running. "We had to just leave everything and look for safety," he says.

FIGURE 20: SHARE OF WORKERS IN STEM JOBS, 2019



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey

The family went to Rwanda and then Uganda, where they became refugees and, after 13 years, were resettled in the United States.

Abedi already knew hard work. He'd had to quit school at 15 to work. His father had disappeared. His mother was ill. His four younger siblings were in school. For two years in Uganda, he installed glass, carrying the heavy slabs up so many stairs that he wanted to cry in pain. He would walk one and a half hours to the construction site. "I couldn't quit," he says. "I became strong."

In Idaho, he had to support the family again, and for months worked two full-time jobs, making \$7.55 an hour as a hotel janitor and \$9 an hour at a car-alarm assembling warehouse. He slept three hours a night.

Later, with the help of One Refugee, a nonprofit that helps refugees earn college degrees and get hired, Abedi got his bachelor's and is now an engineer-in-training for roads and highways. He is married to a woman from Idaho, they have four children, he mentors young people in the community, and he helped design the new State Highway 16. "I feel like I'm helping develop Idaho," he says, laughing.<sup>62</sup>

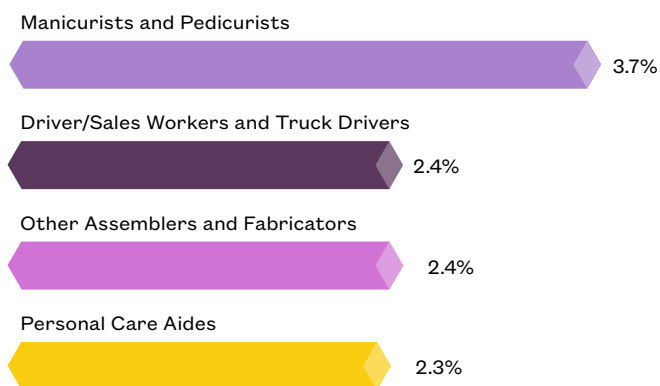


PART IX

# Occupations

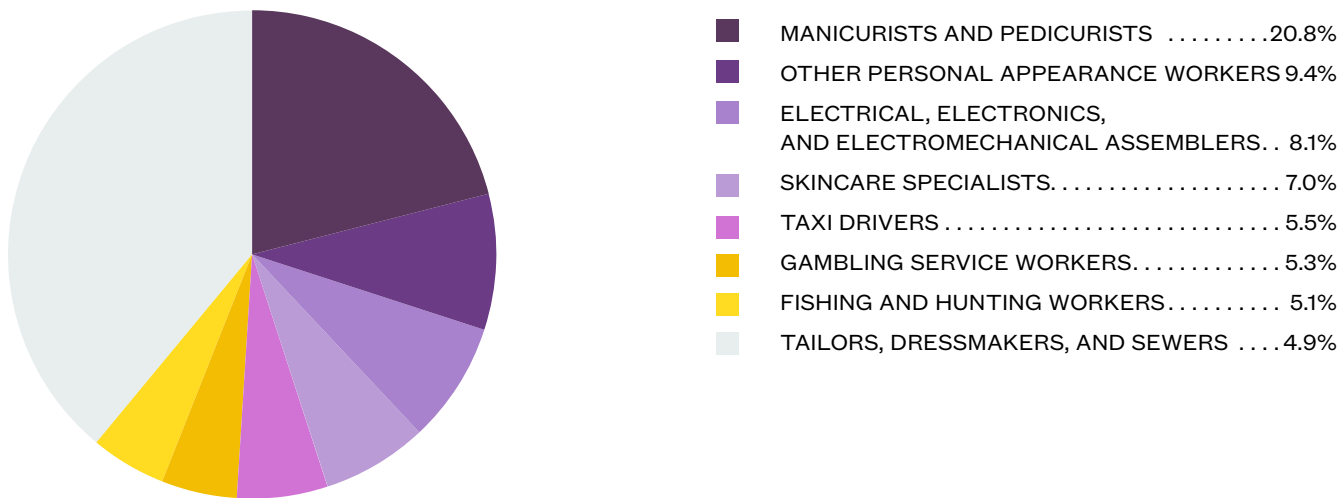
**M**any refugees have spent years in refugee camps and may not have had the opportunity to acquire advanced skills or education. Many cannot speak English. However, they have to get a job quickly. Especially when refugees first arrive, they gravitate to jobs that don't require English language proficiency and workplaces where other members of their community already work. Below we show the occupations where refugees make up the highest share of workers (Figure 21) as well as the share of refugee workers in selected occupations (Figure 22).

**FIGURE 22: TOP OCCUPATIONS FOR REFUGEE WORKERS, 2019**



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey

**FIGURE 21: TOP OCCUPATIONS WITH HIGHEST SHARES OF WORKERS BEING REFUGEES, 2019**



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey

# Conclusion

In an era when refugee policy is frequently mentioned in the news, it is easy to forget that refugees in many ways are just like other generations of immigrants who have come before them. They arrive in the country having escaped hardship, determined to make the most of their opportunity to become Americans. They boast higher entrepreneurship rates than the U.S.-born population or even other immigrants. Many appear to naturalize and become citizens as soon as they are able. Their household incomes increase steadily the longer they remain in the country. In 2019, refugees that had been here more than 20 years had median household incomes that were more than double that of refugees who had arrived within the last five years, and that exceeded the median household income of U.S.-born Americans. This signals that refugees, despite the steepest odds, often manage to achieve the American dream.

Our study also demonstrates why any debate about what refugees potentially cost the U.S. government should be viewed with an eye to the long term. After refugees arrive in the United States, they are frequently eligible for dedicated cash assistance from the federal government which usually amounts to several hundred dollars per month. They also have temporary access to Refugee Medical Assistance for their healthcare needs. That period, however, is short, typically lasting only eight months or less.<sup>63</sup> By growing their incomes in subsequent years—not to mention buying homes and starting businesses at high rates—refugees prove that initial short-term assistance is a smart investment. In fact, a federal study on the costs of the U.S. refugee program, rejected by the Trump administration before publication, found that refugees brought in \$63 billion more in government revenues from 2005 to 2014 than they cost.<sup>64</sup>

This report is certainly by no means the perfect representation of the scope of contributions made by refugees. Because the population is not identified specifically in the U.S. Census, our methodology is able to capture large waves of likely refugees based on their country of birth and year of arrival in the United States, but it inevitably misses some refugees that came from less prominent sending countries. It also does not capture the contributions of the children of refugees, many of whom may have been born in America or may still be too young to have become meaningful earners. In communities across the country—from Los Angeles, California, to Utica, New York—we hear that these children often show the same grit and resilience as their parents, making the honor roll and gifted and talented programs in large numbers.<sup>65</sup>

Second-generation immigrants more generally have been found to out-earn their parents, typically boasting household incomes on par with households led by the U.S.-born.<sup>66</sup>

In a period when little hard economic data is presented on refugees in policy debates, however, this report provides a valuable reminder of the economic contributions of refugees. More work should be done to track the unique successes of this population. It will also be the responsibility of state and local policymakers, many of whom see the impact of refugees most directly, to tell the stories of how refugee contributions are sustaining their communities.

# Methodology Appendix

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## Identifying Likely Refugees

While refugees remain one of the most scrutinized and well-documented types of travelers to the United States, there is surprisingly little quantitative data available on refugees and their socioeconomic characteristics after they are resettled. The main reason for this is that nationally representative surveys that normally provide socioeconomic data to researchers do not include information on respondents' immigration status beyond citizenship status. Therefore, more qualitative researchers have an abundance of information about refugees when they enter but little to examine about their socioeconomic performance as they integrate into U.S. society.

To address this, we use an imputation method to identify cases in microdata that are likely to be refugees. This is similar to the work of Kallick and Mathema<sup>67</sup> as well as Capps et al.<sup>68</sup> on the characteristics of refugee groups in the United States after their resettlement. The main source of our data is the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year sample for 2015-2019. For data on voting patterns, we use the 2020 November Voter Supplements from the Current Population Survey (CPS). Both the ACS and CPS are conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau and all microdata sets were downloaded from the University of Minnesota Population Center's Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) project.

We first isolate the U.S.-born population from the foreign-born using citizenship variables, with those reporting to be U.S.-born citizens or citizens born abroad

to U.S. citizen parents recoded as "U.S.-born." The remaining respondents, those responding as either naturalized citizens or non-U.S. citizens, are recoded as "foreign-born." We use each foreign-born respondent's country of birth and year of arrival to identify those who are likely to be refugees. To identify the years that saw significant inflows of refugees from each country, we use data from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as well as the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration's Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS) database and compare yearly totals with the ACS data showing how many people in the United States were born in each country and the year that each immigrated to the United States. Comparing the two, we assign refugee status to those born in a given country of origin who arrived during years when the number of refugee arrivals from that country according to DHS and WRAPS data exceeded 50 percent of the total population born in a given country who immigrated in each year.

What we find aligns broadly with what we know about refugee numbers in general. The vast majority of the refugees we identify came to the United States after 1980 following the Refugee Act, which established the foundation for modern U.S. refugee policy. There are four main exceptions. First, refugees fleeing from Communist countries in Europe, such as Hungarians in 1956, Yugoslavians, and Soviet refugees until 1989. Second, while the United States has welcomed Iranian refugees consistently and constantly since the Iranian Revolution began in 1978, it is only during the first few years after the revolution that refugees made up a substantial portion of arrivals from the country as a

whole. As a result, we only classify Iranian immigrants from the earliest years as refugees. Third, Ethiopians who fled after the fall of Haile Selassie in 1974 and the Ogaden War of 1978-1979 were also included as refugees. Lastly, refugees from Indochina (i.e. Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos), who began to arrive in 1975 after the fall of Saigon and the signing of the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act are included. A full list of countries of origin and the years for which we considered immigrants from these countries to be refugees can be found below. Additional work was done to identify specific ancestry groups such as Assyrians (i.e. Iraqi Christians) and the Hmong, but we found that this additional layer of cross tabulation did not identify any other likely refugees not already identified using the country of birth and year of immigration cross tabulation.

Two groups are notably absent from our study: Cubans and Haitians. We chose to not include these groups as Cubans and Haitians have mainly been admitted through country-specific programs that confer upon them different benefits and statuses through different processes.

Using this methodology, we are able to identify 102,004 cases in our main data source, the 5-year ACS sample, that are likely refugees. When weighted, these cases represent 2,397,696 people out of a total U.S. population of 324,697,792 in 2019. Inherently, this number and our method do not capture every refugee living in the United States in 2019. Refugee flows from countries that have other more traditional immigration pathways to the United States are not counted here, nor are countries that have sent relatively few refugees or immigrants to the United States overall, since such populations are difficult to pick up in surveys such as the ACS due to small sample sizes.

However, while the counts of refugees may not match the administrative data on resettled refugees, we are confident that our method gives reliable estimates of the characteristics of refugee populations in the United States and are comparable to similar estimates done by the Migration Policy Institute in Capps et al.<sup>69</sup>

TABLE 1: REFUGEE COUNTRIES OF BIRTH AND YEARS OF IMMIGRATION USED TO IMPUTE REFUGEE STATUS

Country of Birth	Years Selected
<b>Afghanistan</b>	1979–1994, 1998–2015, 2017, 2019
<b>Albania</b>	1991–1994
<b>Armenia</b>	1975–1989
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	1975–1989
<b>Bhutan</b>	2007–2015, 2017–2019
<b>Bosnia</b>	1993–2004
<b>Bulgaria</b>	1975–1989
<b>Burma</b>	1997–2015, 2017–2019
<b>Byelorussia</b>	1975–1989
<b>Cambodia</b>	1975–1994
<b>Croatia</b>	1999–2001
<b>Czechoslovakia</b>	1975–1989
<b>Eritrea</b>	2001–2019
<b>Ethiopia</b>	1978–1993, 1999–2008
<b>Republic of Georgia</b>	1975–1989
<b>Hungary</b>	1956–1958, 1975–1989
<b>Iran</b>	1978–1982
<b>Iraq</b>	1990–2015, 2017, 2019
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	1975–1989
<b>Kirghizia</b>	1975–1989
<b>Laos</b>	1975–1997
<b>Latvia</b>	1975–1989

## Key Terms

We define the working-age population as those 16 to 64 years old. Definitions of those in the labor force and employed are the same as in the U.S. Census. As in past Council briefs, we use the term “spending power,” which we define as the disposable income leftover after subtracting federal, state, and local taxes from household income.<sup>70</sup>

To make industry breakdowns easier to understand, we recoded individual industries into broader categories, matching the two-digit codes from the North American Industry Classification System, developed by the Office of Management and Budget and used by federal statistical agencies to classify business establishments.

In this study, we use the term “entrepreneur” and “self-employed” interchangeably. We do not make the distinction between self-employed people who own incorporated or unincorporated businesses. The number of self-employed people is limited to those who reported being self-employed, in the labor force, and not unemployed. We aggregate these entrepreneurs self-declared business income to produce estimates of their total business income.

The data on housing tenure also comes from the ACS. Immigrant homeowners are defined as foreign-born householders who reported living in their own homes, whether owned outright or on a mortgage.

Data on naturalization and eligibility come from the ACS. We use the citizenship variable in the ACS microdata to estimate the naturalized and non-citizen breakdowns of each demographic group.

Data on educational attainments is limited to only the population 25 years old or older, following standard demographic study practices, including those of the U.S. Census. We group master’s, professional, and doctorates together under the blanket term “advanced degrees.”

TABLE 1: REFUGEE COUNTRIES OF BIRTH AND YEARS OF IMMIGRATION USED TO IMPUTE REFUGEE STATUS (CONT.)

Country of Birth	Years Selected
<b>Liberia</b>	1992–2010
<b>Lithuania</b>	1975–1989
<b>Moldavia</b>	1975–1989
<b>Poland</b>	1975–1989
<b>Romania</b>	1975–1989
<b>Russia</b>	1975–1989
<b>Rwanda</b>	2019
<b>Serbia</b>	2001–2004
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	1999–2008
<b>Somalia</b>	1992–2015, 2017, 2019
<b>South Sudan</b>	2016–2017, 2019
<b>Sudan</b>	1990–2015, 2017, 2019
<b>Syria</b>	2014–2015, 2017, 2019
<b>Ukraine</b>	1975–1989
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	1975–1989
<b>Vietnam</b>	1975–1996
<b>Yugoslavia</b>	1975–1999
<b>Zaire/Democratic Republic of Congo</b>	1996–2015, 2018

The estimates for registration rates and active voters are calculated from the Voter Supplement in CPS for the year 2020 using the IPUMS database. The sample in CPS includes only civilian non-institutional persons.

## Calculating Spending Power

Using the 2015-2019 ACS 5-year microdata sample, we estimate the aggregate household income, tax contributions, and spending power of foreign-born households. We estimate state and local taxes using the tax rates estimates produced by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy by state income quintiles.<sup>71</sup> For federal tax rate estimates, we use data released by the Congressional Budget Office in 2022 and calculate the federal tax based on the household income federal tax bracket.<sup>72</sup>

## Calculating Underemployment

Using the Bureau of Labor Statistics standards, we identify lower-skilled jobs as jobs normally requiring a high school degree or less. A full list of occupations can be found on the Bureau of Labor Statistics website.<sup>73</sup> We then cross tabulate those holders of bachelor's degrees or advanced degrees with holders of lower-skilled jobs to estimate the number of underemployed workers in each demographic group.

# Data Appendix

## HOUSEHOLD INCOME, TAX CONTRIBUTIONS, AND SPENDING POWER OF LIKELY REFUGEE HOUSEHOLDS, BY STATE (IN \$ MILLIONS), 2019

State	Number of Likely Refugees	Household Income	Federal Taxes	State and Local Taxes	Spending Power
AL	6,600	315.2M	57.6M	21.3M	236.3M
AK	2,900	114.6M	17.9M	4.6M	92.1M
AZ	46,200	1.3B	211.9M	111.6M	1.0B
AR	5,200	201.9M	33.3M	18.6M	150M
CA	632,400	28.8B	5.3B	2.7B	20.7B
CO	34,500	1.3B	228.3M	104.5M	993.8M
CT	23,200	1.0B	189.6M	113.9M	728.1M
DE	2,500	120.6M	21.5M	7.3M	91.9M
DC	6,100	280.4M	56.8M	27.1M	196.4M
FL	77,100	2.9B	497.6M	183.1M	2.2B
GA	62,300	2.0B	309.9M	177.2M	1.5B
HI	8,000	332.4M	58.8M	35.6M	238M
ID	5,600	130.1M	17.4M	10.6M	102.1M
IL	91,100	3.8B	662.2M	434.8M	2.7B
IN	25,500	611.6M	87.8M	58.3M	465.5M
IA	27,400	747.7M	103.5M	75.3M	568.9M
KA	17,700	524.8M	78.3M	52.3M	394.2M
KY	19,000	458.5M	67.1M	44.2M	347.1M
LA	14,900	554.1M	90.8M	46.5M	416.9M
ME	6,300	141M	19.6M	13.2M	108.3M
MD	52,400	2.3B	413.5M	238M	1.6B
MA	58,800	2.8B	513.5M	242.7M	2.0B
MI	84,200	2.3B	349.8M	197.3M	1.7B
MN	119,600	3.4B	474.7M	327.3M	2.6B
MS	2,900	113.3M	16.8M	9.4M	87.1M
MO	28,900	940.4M	146.7M	80.4M	713.3M

State	Number of Likely Refugees	Household Income	Federal Taxes	State and Local Taxes	Spending Power
NE	18,800	410.1M	49.5M	41.2M	319.4M
NV	21,100	813.6M	131M	49.5M	633.1M
NH	5,300	174.5M	26.4M	11.9M	136.2M
NJ	46,400	2.8B	559.2M	279.5M	2.0B
NM	3,300	125.5M	21.4M	11.2M	93M
NY	136,100	6.3B	1.2B	771.1M	4.3B
NC	42,400	1.4B	216.1M	114.1M	1.0B
ND	4,900	186.2M	29.1M	13.7M	143.4M
OH	55,900	1.4B	197.9M	143.6M	1.1B
OK	16,700	574.7M	94.7M	51.4M	428.6M
OR	29,500	1.2B	197.3M	102M	860.1M
PA	65,700	2.4B	381.4M	235.2M	1.8B
RI	7,300	287M	47.9M	26.6M	212.4M
SC	10,400	355.8M	52M	28.8M	274.9M
SD	6,300	178.4M	23.2M	14M	141.2M
TN	28,500	850.4M	128M	55.4M	666.9M
TX	198,900	7.2B	1.2B	584.3M	5.4B
UT	16,500	476.7M	71.7M	38M	367M
VT	4,100	151.8M	24.7M	15M	112.1M
VA	92,700	4.0B	728.9M	354.2M	3.0B
WA	92,100	3.7B	628.4M	326.2M	2.8B
WI	32,200	1.0B	145.1M	103.5M	778.4M

Notes: Estimates for Montana, West Virginia, and Wyoming are omitted due to small sample size.

Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 5-year sample from the 2019 American Community Survey



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