

Due to the recent media attention, we are all aware of the displaced persons as a result of the Syrian civil war. Since the violence and unrest began four years ago, at least 250,000 people have been killed in Syria and more than 30 times that number have been internally displaced (7.6 million). There are also more than 4 million Syrians who are now refugees in neighboring countries (*Source: U.S. State Department*). Many others have moved on to Europe with the hope of finding a place of peace and safety. The thorough screening process used by the United States has resulted in about 1,200 Syrian refugees admitted into the U.S. so far. In September 2015, President Obama directed the U.S. government to accept at least 10,000 refugees from Syria in the next fiscal year, a six-fold increase over the number admitted this year to the United States. The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) provides updated information on other countries that are also resettling Syrians.

Are Syrian Refugees Coming to Maine?

As the federal contract holder for refugee resettlement services, Catholic Charities' Refugee and Immigration Services (RIS) has not re-settled any refugees from Syria in 2015 and just one in 2014. Due to the lengthy screening processes in place we do not anticipate refugee arrivals from Syria for 1-2 years. While on average RIS resettles 350 refugees a year, in FY2015 we have re-settled 440 to date and may see this number increase in the coming years with the U.S. government's directive to accept more refugees from Syria.

Refugees resettlements are assigned by the U.S. State Department and RIS typically receives notification of a new refugee's arrival, including country of origin, approximately two weeks prior to their arrival.

How can you help?

Although the local response to Syrian refugees will take place in the year to come there are many ways for you and your community to assist the many refugees that are currently residing in Maine. Catholic Charities' RIS is the only resettlement agency in the State of Maine. We work to support refugees through the process of becoming responsible, self-reliant members of the Maine communities into which they are welcomed. This programming includes housing, employment, health care and education supports. In 2015 refugees fled from conflicts in Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Congo, and Eritrea to be resettled in Maine. Resettlement cannot replace what refugees have lost or erase what they have endured but it can renew hope and help restart lives.

We appreciate your interest in assisting with the resettlement of refugees arriving in Maine. Many have already graciously responded to Pope Francis' call to open their homes to those in need. Through our resettlement contract Catholic Charities' RIS Program has responsibility for ensuring that newly arrived

refugees have suitable housing. It is unknown at this time whether there will be a process for local families to consider opening their homes to refugee families.

How to support refugees locally:

- Contribute financially to Refugee and Immigration Services. Donate online (be sure to designate your donation towards *Refugee and Immigration*):
https://salsa3.salsalabs.com/o/50949/p/salsa/donation/common/public/?donate_page_KEY=10581
- Organize a fundraiser to pool resources as a community for further support.
- Volunteer with Catholic Charities Refugee and Immigration Services (available positions listed online):
www.ccmaine.org/volunteer/jobs
- Donate furniture and household items to Catholic Charities Refugee and Immigration Services to help refugees set up a household:
www.ccmaine.org/refugee-immigration-services/support/donate
- Host an educational program about refugees and the resettlement process in your community
- Volunteer with other community organizations who support our resettlement work:

Portland Adult Education:

www.portlandadulted.org/pae2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=234&Itemid=46

Portland Public Schools: Make it Happen Program:

<http://portlandmlc.ss3.sharpschool.com/cms/One.aspx?portalId=7030267&pageId=7031186>

Portland Mentoring Alliance:

<http://blogs.portlandschools.org/phspma>

If you have specific questions about Syrian refugees in the state of Maine, please contact Bethany Edmunds at bethanys@ccmaine.org or (207) 493-8913.

How to support refugees globally:

- Contribute financially to Catholic Relief Services: www.crs.org

For more information on the situation in Syria:

U.S will Accept More Refugees as Crisis Grows:

www.nytimes.com/2015/09/21/world/europe/us-to-increase-admission-of-refugees-to-100000-in-2017-kerry-says.html?_r=0

Syria, Europe and the Boy on the Beach:

www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/syria-boy-refugee-photo-turkey/403606

A Syrian Family Counts Its Blessings:

<http://tracks.unhcr.org/2015/06/a-syrian-family-counts-its-blessings>