



## Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees Myths & Facts Syrian Refugees in the U.S.

**Myth:** Syrian refugees are welfare dependent and will be a drain on the economy.

**Facts:**

- Median income for Syrian families is \$62,000 – \$9,000 higher than other foreign born households (Migration Policy Institute [MPI] Fact Sheet).
- 49% of Syrian men in the U.S. work in high-skilled occupations – e.g. managerial, business, science (MPI Fact Sheet).
- 85% of newly resettled refugees in the U.S. are employed within 180 days (International Rescue Committee).
- There are approximately 4,000 Syrian doctors in the U.S. – an affluent and philanthropic community (National Arab American Medical Association).
- Syrians are highly educated, as a group (MPI Fact Sheet).
  - 39% are college graduates, approximately the same as the percentage of working-age Americans with college degrees overall.
  - Those arriving after 2012 have higher education attainment than previous waves of immigrants.

**Myth:** If we allow Syrian refugees to come to the U.S., we won't know who they are and we will import the same terrorism that Europe is experiencing.

**Facts:**

- The U.S. process for resettling refugees is different from Europe's. Europe processes refugees after they arrive on European soil. The U.S. admits Syrian refugees into the country only after an exhaustive vetting process that typically takes 18 months to two years to complete (Department of Homeland Security [DHS]).
  - Registered refugees are first interviewed in the camps to determine eligibility.
  - Background investigations and screenings are then conducted by relevant U.S. law enforcement agencies, which also enter applicants' biometrics into an electronic database.
  - A final round of screenings is done before approval for admission.
- Of over 800,000 refugees resettled in the U.S. since 9/11, fewer than 10 have been implicated in planning terrorist activities (MPI). **None of them were Syrian.**

- Nearly three-quarters of Syrian refugees resettled in the U.S. are women and male children under 14; 25% are men; the rest are female children and teen-age males. They are themselves escaping terrorists; on a number of occasions, ISIS condemned them for leaving Syria and rejecting its extremist ideology (Refugee Processing Center).
- There is a one in 3.6 billion chance of being killed in a terrorist attack on American soil by the holder of a refugee visa. Put another way, the annual chance of being murdered by another American is 253 times greater than dying in an attack committed by a foreign-born terrorist in the U.S. (Cato Institute).

**Myth:** Syrian refugees (code for Muslims) will change the nature of the U.S.

**Facts:**

- There are 90,000 Syrian immigrants in the U.S., most from earlier waves of migration. (MPI Fact Sheet).
- Currently, the number of Syrian refugees that have been accepted into the U.S. in the six years since the Syrian war began was 20,020, comprising less than ½ of 1/100% (roughly 0.000044%) of the total U.S. population.
- Historically, Muslim immigrants have been better integrated into U.S. society than in many Western European countries (Center for American Progress [CAP]).
  - Muslim Americans have more liberal views on social, religious, and political subjects than Muslims elsewhere; Muslim Americans are quickly adopting the views of other Americans; and Muslim immigrants in the United States are less likely to support terrorism, violence against civilians, and aspects of strict Islamic law (Cato Institute).

**Myth:** Most Americans don't want to accept any Syrian refugees at all, and there's no changing their minds.

**Facts:**

- A TENT\* survey of 11 countries, including the U.S., shows that the messages people get affect their attitudes about refugees. (\*TENT Foundation & Audiencenet Report: Public Perceptions of the Refugee Crisis)
  - 57% of U.S. respondents hold mixed or positive views of refugees.
  - The majority oppose discriminating on the basis of religion.
  - The more people know about the refugees' experiences, the more positive they feel about admitting them.
  - Nearly half of respondents were open to changing their opinions, particularly after learning that most refugees hope to return home.
  - 34% responded positively to stories of refugees assimilating well.
  - 47% said that better knowledge of what is happening in the refugees' home countries would make them more sympathetic to admitting refugees. A large majority of respondents felt responsible and want to help, but don't know how.
  - Key opinion drivers are: feeling a responsibility to help, economic considerations, security, and the need to provide financial assistance.
- A recent Brookings Institution survey indicated that Islamophobia is on the decline. The survey also found that the more heated the rhetoric in targeting a group, the less Americans buy into it. Moreover, the public feels some responsibility for this problem and wants to "do good."