



The High Cost of Resettling Middle Eastern Refugees

Given limited funds, relocation to the U.S. may not be the most effective way to help

By Steven A. Camarota and Karen Zeigler

As Americans continue to debate what to do about the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East, this analysis attempts to estimate the costs of resettling refugees from that region in the United States. Although we do not consider all costs, our best estimate is that in their first five years in the United States each refugee from the Middle East costs taxpayers \$64,370 — 12 times what the UN estimates it costs to care for one refugee in neighboring Middle Eastern countries. The cost of resettlement includes heavy welfare use by Middle Eastern refugees; 91 percent receive food stamps and 68 percent receive cash assistance. Costs also include processing refugees, assistance given to new refugees, and aid to refugee-receiving communities. Given the high costs of resettling refugees in the United States, providing for them in neighboring countries in the Middle East may be a more cost-effective way to help them.

Among the findings of this analysis:

- On average, each Middle Eastern refugee resettled in the United States costs an estimated \$64,370 in the first five years, or \$257,481 per household.
- The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has requested \$1,057 to care for each Syrian refugee annually in most countries neighboring Syria.
- For what it costs to resettle one Middle Eastern refugee in the United States for five years, about 12 refugees can be helped in the Middle East for five years, or 61 refugees can be helped for one year.
- UNHCR reports a gap of \$2.5 billion in funding that it needs to care for approximately four million Syrians in neighboring countries.
- The five-year cost of resettling about 39,000 Syrian refugees in the United States is enough to erase the current UNHCR funding gap.
- The five-year costs of resettlement in the United States include \$9,230 spent by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within HHS and the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) within the State Department in the first year, as well as \$55,139 in expenditures on welfare and education.
- Very heavy use of welfare programs by Middle Eastern refugees, and the fact that they have only 10.5 years of education on average, makes it likely that it will be many years, if ever, before this population will cease to be a net fiscal drain on public coffers — using more in public services than they pay in taxes.
- It is worth adding that ORR often reports that most refugees are self-sufficient within five years. However, ORR defines “self-sufficiency” as not receiving cash welfare. A household is still considered “self-sufficient” even if it is using any number of non-cash programs such as food stamps, public housing, or Medicaid.

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- Refugees are admitted for humanitarian reasons, not because they are supposed to be self-sufficient, so the drain on public coffers that Middle Eastern refugees create is expected. However, given limited resources, the high cost of resettlement in the United States means careful consideration should be given to alternatives to resettlement if the goal is the help as many people possible.

Introduction

The U.S. government publishes some information on welfare use and money spent to resettle refugees in the United States. Based on that information, this analysis finds that the costs of resettling refugees in the United States are quite high, even without considering all of the costs refugees create. We conservatively estimate that the costs total \$64,370 in the first five years for each Middle Eastern refugee. This is 61 times what it costs to care for one Syrian refugee in a neighboring country for a single year or about 12 times the cost of providing for a refugee for five years. It must be kept in mind that refugees are admitted for humanitarian reasons, so the high cost of refugee resettlement is to be expected. But funds are limited and UNHCR is chronically short of money to help the millions of refugees in the world, including those in the Middle East.

There are always competing demands on government resources. And while the public may feel a strong sense of sympathy for those in dire circumstances, their willingness to help has limits. If policymakers want to make optimal use of American resources to help those fleeing war, they should consider alternatives to resettling refugees in this country.

The estimated costs reported here are conservative because they only include costs incurred by the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM); costs for resettlement within the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR); public education; and most welfare programs. There are many public expenditures not included in this analysis, such as the cost of local social workers who help refugees sign up for assistance, English language instruction in public schools not covered by ORR, and many means-tested programs such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, Head Start, and the Additional Child Tax Credit, for which we do not have data. Costs for basic government services such as infrastructure maintenance, law enforcement, and fire protection are also not included. While Middle Eastern refugees in the first five years must pay some taxes to offset a fraction of the costs they create, published data from ORR indicates that more than 90 percent of households have incomes below 130 percent of poverty, which means they will pay virtually no income tax and will make very modest tax contributions of all types.

The baseline year of this analysis is 2013 as this is the most recent year for which complete budget, refugee admission data, and estimates of refugee welfare use are available in most cases. Unless otherwise indicated, our cost estimates apply to that year. We multiply the 2013 welfare and education costs by five to get a five-year estimate.

Methodology for Estimating Costs

State Department Expenditures. The State Department reports that 69,926 refugees were admitted to the United States in 2013.¹ While the State Department also helps refugees overseas, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) within the State Department spent \$310 million on resettling refugees in the United States in 2013.² This means that an average of \$4,433 was spent per refugee in 2013. These figures include costs for the “overseas processing of refugee applications, transportation-related services, and initial reception” and “housing, furnishings, clothing, food, medicine, employment, and social service referrals.”³ In this analysis we assume the amount spent by PRM per Middle Eastern refugee is the same as for refugees from the rest of the world.⁴

Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). The ORR spent nearly a billion dollars in 2013, but a significant share went to help the resettlement of unaccompanied minors and their families from Central America. Expenditures on new refugees and other related groups such as Cuban/Haitian entrants and asylees were \$613,963,000 in 2013. Asylees and Cuban/Haitian entrants are essentially eligible for the same programs as refugees. Dividing this amount by the 128,000 individuals that ORR reports are covered by its programs (excluding unaccompanied minors) means that \$4,797 was spent per refugee by ORR in 2013.⁵ In general, ORR only provides assistance to local communities, charities, and the refugees themselves in the first year after they arrive in the country or are awarded asylum. After a year, charities and state and local social service agencies are expected to care for them.

Refugees and Welfare. Unlike other new legal immigrants, refugees are eligible for all welfare programs upon arrival. Further, there are several short-term programs, such as Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) and Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA), for which only refugees and other humanitarian immigrants are eligible. Refugees have the most generous access to welfare programs of any population in the country. The ORR conducts the Annual Survey of Refugees each year and the 2013 survey provides a detailed profile of the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of refugees who entered the country in the prior five years, including use of many of the nation's major welfare programs by sending region. We use information published by ORR on Middle Eastern refugees' welfare use as the basis of our cost estimates.

Welfare Use Rates. The 2013 Annual Survey of Refugees shows the following welfare use rates for Middle Eastern refugee households: 32.1 percent receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI), 36.7 percent receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), 17.3 percent receive General Assistance, 91.4 percent receive the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also called food stamps), and 18.7 percent live in public housing. The refugee survey also reports that 73.1 percent of individual Middle Eastern refugees are on Medicaid or Refugee Medical Assistance.⁶

It should be kept in mind that the survey reports welfare use for all Middle Eastern refugees who arrived in the last five years, not just new arrivals. Many refugees get RMA and RCA, but then transition to Medicaid and other cash programs like TANF or SSI after the eight-month eligibility window for RMA and RCA runs out. So, for example, use of TANF is likely lower for the first eight months than the 36.7 percent reported above. To be sure, some refugees access cash welfare or Medicaid in the first eight months. But for those refugees who have been in the country for more than eight months the rate is higher than 36.7 percent. The 36.7 percent represents the use rate for all Middle Eastern refugees in the Annual Survey of Refugees who arrived in prior five years averaged together. For this reason, it is possible to estimate five-year costs for welfare programs based on published information from the survey, but it is not possible to estimate welfare costs for, say, the first year after arrival.

It should be noted that published figures from the refugee survey provide only use rates, not payment amounts received by refugees. It is necessary to estimate payments using other data sources.

Average Welfare Payments and Costs. To estimate welfare payments and costs by household we use Census Bureau data and other information. To get per-person costs for programs reported at the household level, we divide by four based on the assumption that average Middle Eastern refugee households receiving welfare consist of four people. This assumption is based on the Annual Survey of Refugees.⁷ The results of this approach are shown in Table 1.

To estimate average payments by household for SSI, SNAP, and TANF we use the public-use files of the 2013 to 2015 Annual Social and Economic Supplement of the Current Population Survey (ASEC CPS) collected by the Census Bureau. We match the countries listed as being part of the Middle East to the ORR list of countries from that area using the country of birth reported in the ASEC CPS.⁸ The ASEC CPS shows an average payment of \$13,494 from SSI for immigrant households from the Middle East (refugee and non-refugee) using the program. For TANF, the same data shows an average payment of \$5,061, and for SNAP it was \$4,039.⁹ It should be noted that the ASEC CPS generally underestimates welfare use.¹⁰ Because we do not adjust for this undercount, actual average payments are likely higher than that reported here.¹¹ All payment figures are rounded to nearest dollar.

To estimate payments from general assistance programs, we average state payment figures compiled by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP). The average annual benefit across states for this program is \$2,885.¹² (We assume that there is only one person per refugee household receiving this program.) For the average cost of housing programs we use the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) website, which shows an average cost per unit of public or subsidized housing of \$637 per month (\$7,644 per year).¹³

The Annual Survey of Refugees does not provide estimated use rates for the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) nutrition program or the free or subsidized school lunch program. For completeness, we include estimates for these small programs by assuming that the use rates for these two programs among Middle Eastern refugees is proportional to their use of SNAP.¹⁴ As Table 1 shows, the school lunch program and WIC add only modestly to the five-year average costs per individual. However, refugee use of these programs still would cost millions of dollars annually.

Table 1. Estimated Five-Year Costs for Middle Eastern Refugees Resettled in the U.S.

	Use Rate	Average Annual Payment	Average 5-Year Individual Costs	Average 5-Year Household Costs
SSI	32.1%	\$13,494	\$5,414	\$21,658
TANF	36.7%	\$5,061	\$2,322	\$9,287
SNAP	91.4%	\$4,039	\$4,615	\$18,458
General Assistance	17.3%	\$2,885	\$624	\$2,496
Public/Subsidized Housing	18.7%	\$7,644	\$1,787	\$7,147
WIC	20.0%	\$519	\$130	\$519
School Lunch	33.3%	\$491	\$204	\$818
Medicaid	62.2%	\$6,897	\$21,450	\$85,799
Without Health Insurance	12.7%	\$1,943	\$1,234	\$4,935
Public Education	28.0%	\$12,401	\$17,361	\$69,446
Total for Welfare, Uninsured, and Education			\$55,140	\$220,562
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration within State Department			\$4,433	\$17,733
Office of Refugee Resttlement within Department of Health & Human Services			\$4,797	\$19,186
Total Costs			\$64,370	\$257,481

Source: Rates for SSI, TANF, SNAP, general assistance, and housing are from the [2013 Annual Survey of Refugees](#) (ASR) and are household-based. Figures for Medicaid and lack of health insurance are also from the ASR, but reflect individual use rates. Average payments for SSI, TANF, and SNAP are from Census Bureau data. Average payments for some programs come from administrative data and other sources. Average education costs are from the [National Center for Education Statistics](#). We estimate that 28 percent of refugees are school-age (1.12 students per household). See text for additional explanation for how estimates were made.

Health Insurance Coverage. Healthcare coverage is reported at the individual level in the refugee survey, not the household level. There are three types of “coverage” that create costs for taxpayers: the Refugee Medical Assistance program, Medicaid, and those refugees who are uninsured. Costs for the RMA program are covered by ORR and are included in the expenditures for that agency reported above. For the Medicaid cost we use the average costs figure reported in the Office of the Actuary for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services annual report. In 2013, the program cost was \$6,897 per enrollee.¹⁵ The refugee survey reports 12.7 percent of individual Middle Eastern refugees had no medical coverage in any of the previous 12 months.¹⁶ Based on information from the Kaiser Family Foundation on the non-elderly without health insurance, we estimate that uninsured refugees cost \$1,943 on average annually.¹⁷

Public Education. Data is not reported in the refugee survey on the share of Middle Eastern refugees who are in primary or secondary school. However, the refugee survey does show that 65.1 percent of all refugee households who arrived in the previous five years, not just those from the Middle East, have children under age 16.¹⁸ The State Department also reports that 24.1 percent of Iraqi and 33.6 percent of Afghan refugees were school-age (five to 17), the two largest groups of Middle Eastern refugees for which there are statistics in fiscal year 2013.¹⁹ Based on these figures, we estimate that 28 percent of new Middle Eastern refugees are school-age and enrolled in public school. This means that there is slightly more than one child in public school per Middle Eastern refugee household.

The National Center for Education Statistics reports that average per-pupil expenditures in the United States are \$12,401.²⁰ There are certainly added expenses associated with helping refugee children in school, such as helping those who have emotional issues due having been traumatized. We do not include those costs here partly because we do not have any reliable figures for how much extra it costs to educate these children. We also do not include them because some share of these costs are paid for, at least in the first year, by ORR grants and are included above in that agency’s expenditures in the first five years.

Putting Payment and Use Rates Together. Table 1 combines use rates and average payments to create five-year cost estimates for Middle Eastern refugees. This is done in the following manner, using SSI as an example: The reported household use rate of 32.1 percent by households for SSI is multiplied by the average SSI payment of \$13,494 for an average cost of \$4,332 a year from this program per household. (As already discussed, we assume four individuals per household on average.) Dividing the SSI average cost per household by four translates into individual costs of \$1,083 per year for each Middle Eastern refugee. We then multiply this by five to estimate five-year costs for the average refugee for this program, which is \$5,414. This approach is applied to each program. We then multiply by four to get the average five-year household cost, which in the case of SSI comes to \$21,658.

Note that figures for Medicaid and those without health insurance are reported by ORR from the Annual Survey of Refugees at the individual level, not the household level. Therefore, to get a cost estimate for Medicaid and the uninsured at the household level it is necessary to multiply by four.

Published figures from the refugee survey show a Middle Eastern refugee use rate of 73.1 percent for Medicaid *and* Refugee Medical Assistance together. To estimate use of Medicaid separately from RMA, we assume that the share receiving RMA is the same as the share receiving Refugee Cash Assistance (10.9 percent) and subtract that total from the 73.1 percent figure. This means that an estimated 62.2 percent of individual Middle Eastern refugees who arrived in the last five years are on Medicaid. RMA costs are included in the budget for ORR and are therefore not shown separately in the table.

Results

Estimated Per-Person Costs. The table shows that each Middle Eastern refugee creates a cost of \$64,370 in the first five years on average. Per-refugee costs include \$9,230 spent by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). They also include \$55,140 in expenditures on welfare and education for the first five years. While the costs for ORR and PRM are only in the first year, welfare and education costs persist for many years. At the household level, the five-year cost is \$257,481. It should be clear that what drives these costs are the initial expenditures by ORR and PRM and the very high use of welfare by Middle Eastern refugees.

Costs in Other Countries. Comparing the estimated costs of refugee resettlement in other developed countries is difficult because each has its own very different system for delivering social services to its overall population. Further, they all have their own systems for helping humanitarian immigrants and their own methodologies for what to include when they report expenditures on refugees. A 2010 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report shows that, despite different ways of estimating costs across countries, most spent between \$10,000 and \$25,000 a year per refugee or asylee. Dividing our cost estimate by five would indicate annual average costs of \$12,874, though the first years are likely the highest due to ORR and PRM expenditures. The OECD reports shows first-year expenditures for 2009 of \$10,196 in the United States. But while this estimate includes ORR and PRM expenditures, the only welfare program counted is food stamps. Other welfare programs and education are not included.²¹

Recent reports indicate that it would cost Norway a billion NOK (\$123.46 million) in the first five years to resettle 1,000 refugees, or \$24,691 per refugee per year.²² The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* has reported that Germany spends \$14,500 a year to resettle a refugee.²³ Very broadly defined, our estimated costs for resettling Middle Eastern refugees in the United States are in line with what most other first world countries spend.

Taxes Refugees Pay

While information is limited, refugees must pay something in taxes. There is some information in the 2013 Annual Survey of Refugees that provides insight into refugees' likely tax payments. The survey shows, for example, that 91.4 percent of refugee households from the Middle East reported that they received food stamps. In general, households can receive food stamps only if their income is below 130 percent of the poverty threshold. For the most part, households at or below this income level have no federal income tax liability and most will also have no state income tax liability. In fact, those earning less than 130 percent of poverty almost always qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit, and if they have children they will also qualify for the refundable portion the Additional Child Tax Credit. Under these two programs, low-income workers pay no federal income taxes and instead receive a significant cash payment from the IRS. (Costs for these programs are not included in this analysis).

While very few Middle Eastern immigrants pay income tax in the first five years, there are other types of taxes. However, those in or near poverty generally make very modest payments for other types of taxes as well. The Annual Survey of Refugees shows that the average hourly wage for all refugees who worked was just \$9.79 an hour in 2013. Even those who worked and had been in the country for five years at the time of the 2013 refugee survey still earned only \$10.50 an hour on average. ORR also reports that 38.9 percent of all refugees both work and receive cash welfare.²⁴

There is no detailed, publicly available data on Middle Eastern refugees who have been in the country for more than five years. The Annual Survey of Refugees only surveys people who have come to the country in the last five years. Moreover, large-scale refugee resettlement from the Middle East is a relatively new phenomenon so there is little past information to extrapolate into the future. However, the refugee survey shows that Middle Eastern immigrants who entered in the last five years have only 10.5 years of education on average.²⁵ There is research showing that immigrants (not just refugees) with less than a high school education (12 years of schooling) are a large fiscal drain during their lifetime — creating much larger costs for public coffers than they pay in taxes.²⁶

Given the education level of Middle Eastern refugees, the costs associated with processing and screening them, the assistance provided by ORR and PRM, and their heavy welfare use, it seems almost certain that it will be many years, if ever, before these refugees as a group will cease to be a net fiscal drain. Of course, refugees are admitted for humanitarian reasons and the fiscal burden they create for taxpayers should be interpreted in light of this fact.

It is worth adding that ORR often reports that most refugees are self-sufficient within five years. In fact, the ORR report actually uses the term “entirely self-sufficient” at one point. This is also sometimes referred as supporting oneself with “earnings only”. However, ORR defines self-sufficiency in a way that is contrary to the common understanding of the word. A household is considered self-sufficient if it is not receiving “a cash assistance grant”. But other welfare programs do not count under the ORR definition of “self-sufficient”. Thus, a refugee household is still considered self-sufficient even if it is using any number of non-cash programs such as receiving food stamps, living in public housing, or being enrolled in Medicaid.²⁷ This fact should be kept in mind when reading ORR reports.

Cost of Providing for Refugees in the Middle East

According to the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), there were a total of 4.29 million registered Syrian refugees as of November 3, 2015, and it appealed for \$4.533 billion (about \$1,057 per refugee) to care for them.²⁸ Most Syrian refugees are in the neighboring countries of Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. While this might seem like a low level of funding, the UN also reports that the poverty line in Lebanon is \$3.84 a day (\$1,402 a year) for a family, presumably of three to five individuals.²⁹ Clearly, keeping a family above poverty in Lebanon is much less costly than in the United States, where a family of four is in poverty if its income is below about \$24,000 a year. Housing, feeding, and otherwise providing for refugees from Syria or Iraq in neighboring safe countries is dramatically less expensive than resettling them in developed countries such as the United States.

The UNHCR reports a funding gap of \$2.5 billion between what it needs to provide for refugees and what it has received from donors. Based on what it costs to resettle one Middle Eastern refugee in the United States for five years, 61 refugees can be helped in the Middle East for one year or 12 refugees can be helped for five years. Alternately, the five-year cost of resettling about 39,000 Syrian refugees in the United States is enough to entirely erase the current UNHCR funding gap. Of course, the material life of a refugee in the United States is almost certainly better than in a city or refugee camp in a nearby country.

Conclusion

America has a long tradition of being a refuge for those fleeing war and persecution, but the modern system of refugee resettlement comes with a very high cost. This analysis attempts to conservatively estimate the costs for refugees from the Middle East based on government data. One may argue that when it comes to refugees costs should not matter because refugees are admitted for humanitarian reasons. But this position makes little sense. Funds to resettle refugees in this country or to help them overseas are never unlimited and there are always competing demands for public monies. The federal budget deficit was more than \$400 billion in 2015 and 47 million U.S. residents live in poverty, including one-fifth of the nation's children. Resources to deal with the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East are finite.

Processing refugee applicants, assisting charities that serve refugees, helping state and local governments in refugee-receiving communities, and providing welfare and public education create estimated costs of \$64,370 in the first five years after a refugee arrives from the Middle East. These costs are significant and must be incorporated into any discussion of how best to handle the Middle East refugee crisis.

The UN spends \$1,057 per refugee to help them in the region. Comparing the five-year cost of bringing one refugee to the United States to the cost of providing for someone in the region shows that for each refugee resettled here, 61 can be helped if they remain in a safe neighboring country such as Turkey, Jordan, or Lebanon for one year. At present, the UN reports a \$2.5 billion funding gap between what it needs to care for some four million Syrian refugees in the Middle East and what it has received from donor nations. This is equal to the five-year costs of resettling just 39,000 Middle Eastern refugees in the United States.

Wealthy countries like the United States that have costly refugee resettlement programs face a choice: They can help a relatively tiny number of refugees who in effect win what might be called the "migration lottery" and are resettled here, or they can devote the limited resources available to helping many more refugees in the region for the same amount of money. If the goal is to help as many people as possible, then assisting Middle Eastern refugees in their home region gives a far greater return on public money.

To be sure, the material life of refugees in the United States will, with few exceptions, be better than if they remain in the region. However, providing for them a neighboring country has two additional advantages other than being more cost-effective. First, other countries in the region have similar cultures, while adapting to the United States can be challenging for people who have already suffered from war and deprivation. Second, if refugees remain in the region, they will be much more likely to return home once the war is over. If, on the other hand, they are resettled on the other side of the world in this country, it is much less likely they will ever return to their home country.

The refugee crisis in the Middle East defies simple answers. If the United States wants to help, it must soberly assess what can be done given limited resources. This analysis has shown, not surprisingly, that resettling refugees in this country is very costly. This fact must be a part of any discussion of what to do about the current humanitarian crisis.

End Notes

¹ Figures for refugees admitted in FY 2013 can be found at the State Department's [website](#).

² [“Congressional Budget Justification Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs FY 2015”](#), State Department, March 2014. Page 164 shows 2013 expenditures for refugees.

³ See p. 34 of [“Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance Fiscal Year 2014 Congressional Presentation”](#), United States Department of State Migration and Refugee Assistance, 2014.

⁴ It is not entirely clear from budget documents whether the \$310 million spent by PRM for “refugee resettlement” to the United States includes the international airfare that brings the refugees to the United States. PRM also spends a significant amount of money outside of the United States that is not part of the refugee resettlement budget. Some of this money goes to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which pays for the plane tickets for refugees in the form of an interest-free loan to the refugee, using State Department money. It should be added that the IOM takes 25 percent of any money collected from refugees who repay some or all of their plane ticket loan. IOM then dispenses this money to private refugee agencies such as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops — not the State Department and U.S. taxpayers. The State Department releases only limited information about loan repayment rates. Most critically, they do not release information on the share of loans that have to be written off.

⁵ Actual expenditures as reported on p. 10 of the “Office of Refugee Resettlement Annual Report to Congress FY 2013” show expenditures of \$623,304,000 on refugees and other related populations, excluding unaccompanied minors. However, \$9,341,000 went to 500 victims of trafficking according to the report. We exclude trafficking victims and the money spent on them from this estimate. Page 1 of ORR's annual report shows 128,000 individuals covered by ORR programs, not including trafficking victims and unaccompanied minors. [“Office of Refugee Resettlement Annual Report to Congress FY 2013”](#), U.S. Department Of Health And Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2013.

⁶ Pages 101-102 of the ORR report show welfare use figures for Middle Eastern refugees. ORR reports Medicaid and RMA use rates together. Costs for RMA are included in the ORR budget, so to avoid double counting we estimate that 10.9 percent of those on these two programs are on RMA. The 10.9 percent is the rate for receipt of Refugee Cash Assistance, reported on p. 101, which is often linked to RMA. Thus, our estimate is that 62.2 percent of Middle Eastern refugees use Medicaid (73.1 percent minus 10.9 percent). [“Office of Refugee Resettlement Annual Report to Congress FY 2013”](#), U.S. Department Of Health And Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2013.

⁷ The ORR survey reports on p. 98 that for all refugee households receiving public assistance of some kind, there is an average household size of 4.11. [“Office of Refugee Resettlement Annual Report to Congress FY 2013”](#), U.S. Department Of Health And Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2013.

⁸ Page 87 footnote 4 shows the countries included in each region of the world for which figures are reported by ORR. ORR defines the “Middle East” as follows: Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen. [“Office of Refugee Resettlement Annual Report to Congress FY 2013”](#), U.S. Department Of Health And Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2013.

⁹ Assuming an average household size of four for Middle Eastern refugees, we confine our analysis to households from the region with three to five members. The 2015 ASEC CPS public-use file does not currently include payments for SNAP, and so the average reflects figures for 2013 and 2014.

¹⁰ For a discussion of how the ASEC CPS undercounts welfare compared to another Census survey called the Survey of Income and Program Participation, see pp. 3-4 in Steven A. Camarota, [“Welfare Use by Immigrant and Native Households: An Analysis of Medicaid, Cash, Food, and Housing Programs”](#), Center for Immigration Studies, 2015.

¹¹ The TANF figures from the ASEC CPS can also include some money for several small cash assistance programs in addition to TANF. There is another Census Bureau survey, the Survey of Income and Program Participation, that more accurately measures welfare use, however country of birth for immigrants is not reported in the public-use data so it is not possible to use that survey to estimate welfare payments for immigrants from the Middle East.

¹² The monthly average is \$240.43. Liz Schott and Misha Hill, [“State General Assistance Programs Are Weakening Despite Increased Need”](#), Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, July 9, 2015. The data for the CBPP report on state general assistance programs does not include every state and is for 2015, not 2013. But it does include most of the states that have such programs and payments for this program changed little if at all from 2013 to 2015.

¹³ The HUD [user dataset](#) for 2013 provides the \$637 figure per unit. These costs are primarily for public and Section 8 housing. The HUD website shows the average public or subsidized unit has only 2.1 residents, so it is very likely that refugees, with their larger average household size, need somewhat larger than average units and the actual cost for housing them is higher than \$7,644 a year.

¹⁴ We use the ratio of school lunch and WIC for those on SNAP as the basis to estimate use rates. Based on the 2013 to 2015 ASEC CPS, we assume that a third of Middle Eastern immigrant households use school lunch and a fifth receive WIC payments. To estimate average costs for these programs, we employ the following method: the free school lunch program costs \$2.93 per meal and the subsidized lunch program costs \$2.53. We average these two values, which comes to \$2.73, and multiply this average by 180 days, which comes to \$491 a year (figures are for the 2013-2014 school year). Figures for the school lunch program come from the [Food Resource and Action Center](#). The average monthly payment under WIC in 2013 was \$43.26; multiplied by 12 this comes to \$519 a year. U.S. Department of Agriculture information on average payment size for the program can be found [here](#).

¹⁵ 2013 per enrollee costs can be found on p. 17 of the [“2014 Actuarial Report on the Financial Outlook for Medicaid”](#), Office of the Actuary, Centers for the Medicare and Medicaid Service, 2014.

¹⁶ Page 99 the ORR report shows that 12.7 percent of Middle Eastern refugees lack health insurance. [“Office of Refugee Resettlement Annual Report to Congress FY 2013”](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2013.

¹⁷ Kaiser estimates that the non-elderly who are uninsured for a year receive \$2,443 on average in health care, \$500 of which is paid out of pocket. The overwhelming majority of the \$1,943 remaining comes from federal, state, and local taxpayers, but a small fraction comes from health providers or is passed on to those with insurance. See p. 2 of Teresa A. Coughlin, John Holahan, Kyle Caswell, and Megan McGrath, [“Uncompensated Care for Uninsured in 2013: A Detailed Examination”](#), Kaiser Family Foundation, May 2014.

¹⁸ Page 98 the ORR report reports the share of all refugees with children under the age of 16. [“Office of Refugee Resettlement Annual Report to Congress FY 2013”](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2013.

¹⁹ See Table V, p. 63, in [“Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2015 Report To The Congress”](#), United States Department of State, United States Department of Homeland Security, and United States Department of Health and Human Services. Administrative data from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services shows that of all new refugees, one-third in recent years have been 17 and under; see Daniel C. Martin and James E. Yank, [“Refugees and Asylees: 2013”](#), DHS, Office of Immigration Statistics, March 2014.

²⁰ [Fast Facts](#), National Center for Education website.

²¹ Page 28 of the report explains what costs are included in the estimate for the United States. Note that the cost estimate is for 2009, not 2013. [“ODA Reporting Of In-Donor Country Refugee Costs: Members’ methodologies for calculating costs”](#), OECD, 2010.

²² [“FrP: Norway Will Not Take 10,000 Syrian Refugees”](#), the Nordic Page (Norway), May 3, 2015.

²³ See [“Germany: 800,000 refugees - and then what?”](#), Al Jazeera, Wednesday, September 9, 2015.

²⁴ Table II-16 on p. 97 of the ORR report shows that, in 2013, 38.9 percent of all refugees were supporting themselves with both earnings and “public assistance”, which is cash welfare. Public assistance as defined by ORR does not include use of non-cash programs such as food stamps or Medicaid. The same table shows that 34.1 percent of refugees in the country for five years had earnings, but also received cash welfare. [“Office of Refugee Resettlement Annual Report to Congress FY 2013”](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2013.

²⁵ Table II-13 on p. 92 of the ORR report shows that, in 2013, immigrants from the Middle East had 10.5 years of schooling on average. [“Office of Refugee Resettlement Annual Report to Congress FY 2013”](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2013.

²⁶ In the largest and most definitive study of its kind, the National Research Council estimated in 1997 that during his or her lifetime, excluding descendants, the average immigrant with less than a high school education created a net fiscal burden of negative \$89,000; for an immigrant with only a high school education, the figure was negative \$31,000. In contrast, immigrants with more education were a net fiscal benefit in their lifetimes (Table 7.5 page 334). James P. Smith and Barry Edmonston, eds., [The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration on the Demographic and Economic Impacts of Immigration](#), Washington, D.C.: National Research Council, 1997.

²⁷ Citing [CFR 45 400.2](#), the Office of Refugee Resettlement states that “Economic self-sufficiency in ORR’s program is defined in federal regulations as ‘earning a total family income at a level that enables a family unit to support itself without receipt of a cash assistance grant.’” (Emphasis added.) See p. 11 in the pdf of Peggy Halpern, [“Refugee Economic Self-Sufficiency: An Exploratory Study of Approaches Used in Office of Refugee Resettlement Programs”](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, November 2008. This definition of self-sufficiency is the reason that in their most recent annual report (p. 98) ORR states that “half (50 percent) of all refugee households in the U.S. achieved economic self-sufficiency.” But the same report also shows on p.102 that 74.2 percent of all refugee households are on SNAP (food stamps). [“Office of Refugee Resettlement Annual Report to Congress FY 2013”](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Office of Refugee Resettlement.

²⁸ The UNHCR webpage on November 3, 2015, showed 4.29 million registered Syrian refugees and the appeal to donor nations is \$4.533 billion to service this population. This translates to average spending of \$1,057 per refugee. The UNHCR [website](#) shows a funding gap of \$2.51 billion between what it has requested from donors and what it has received as of November 2015.

²⁹ See p. 26 in [“Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2015-2016 Regional Strategic Overview In Response to the Syria Crisis”](#), UNHCR, 2015.