

ISSUE PAPERS 2016 LEGISLATIVE SESSION



DEPARTMENT OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES 2015

Social Programs

Refugee Assistance in Maryland

Refugees are persons granted protective status while abroad. Typically, they have been forced to flee their homeland and are unable to return. In federal fiscal 2015, about 1,800 refugees resettled in Maryland; an estimated 2,100 refugees are expected in federal fiscal 2016. This issue paper describes refugees recently resettled in Maryland and the services available to refugees through the Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees and local school systems.

Background

Federal law defines a refugee as a person who (1) is outside the United States; (2) is of special humanitarian concern; (3) demonstrates persecution of fear or persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group; (4) is not firmly resettled in another country; and (5) is admissible to the United States. Nationally, the U.S. Department of State works to determine the location of refugee resettlement through reception and placement programs. The Department of Human Resources' Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees (MORA) administers federally funded services for individuals resettling in Maryland, while school-aged refugees are educated in local public school systems throughout Maryland.

Refugees Resettled in Maryland

From federal fiscal 2010 through 2014, Maryland received 6,716 refugees (2% of refugees resettled nationally), or about 1,300 annually, most of whom arrived from Asia (approximately 76%). During this period, Baltimore City (43%) and Montgomery County (34%) received the largest share of refugees. Other jurisdictions receiving refugees included Prince George's County (9%), Howard County (4%), and Baltimore County (4%), while all other jurisdictions received 5% of refugees resettled in Maryland. In federal fiscal 2015, 1,803 refugees were resettled in Maryland.

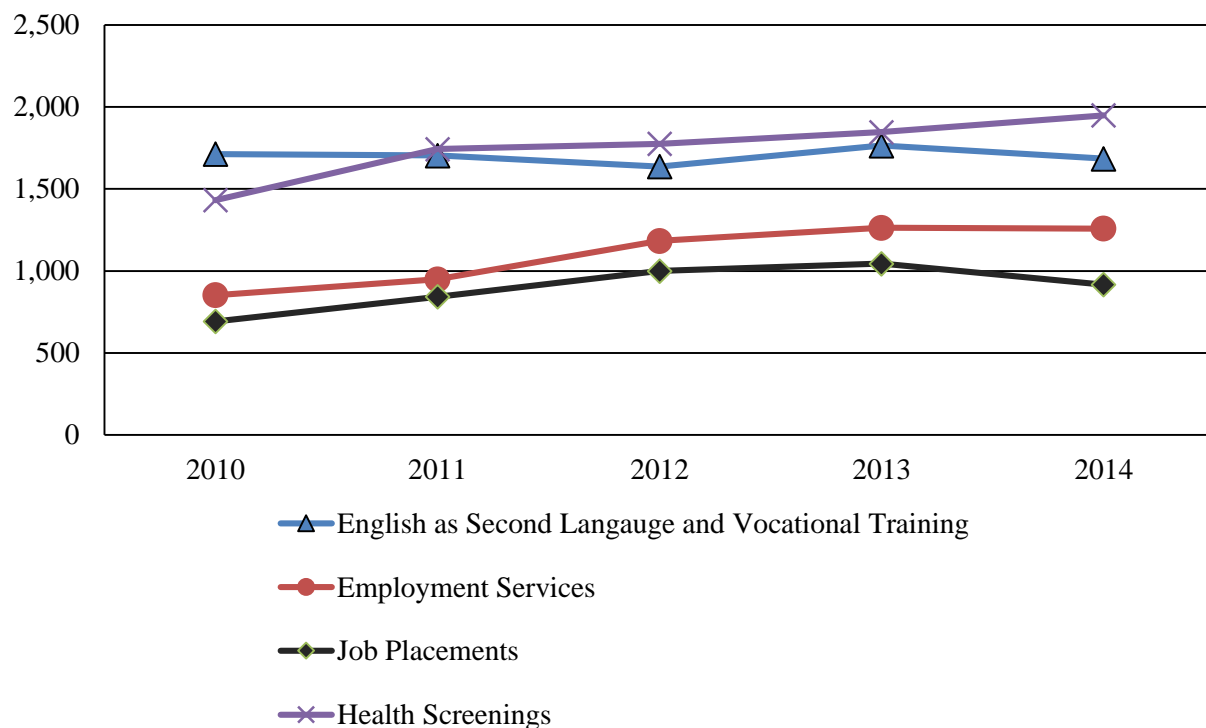
Services Provided by the Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees

MORA administers federal programs offered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement. MORA prepares to receive refugees by meeting with funded partners, county and city officials, and other stakeholders bimonthly regarding the needs of incoming refugees. MORA also provides technical assistance to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and local colleges to ensure these organizations have necessary tools to

serve the refugee population, including training in cultural competency and language access. In fiscal 2016, MORA has seven positions and a budget of \$14.4 million in federal funds.

Services provided through MORA include (1) English language instruction and vocational training; (2) employment services; (3) health screenings; and (4) cash assistance. Health screenings are conducted by DHMH within the first 90 days after entry into the United States. Additional services are provided through public private partnership organizations (Baltimore Resettlement Center and the Suburban Washington Resettlement Center). Services are generally time limited, with most services available for 5 years; however, cash assistance is available only for the first 8 months. **Exhibit 1** provides information on the number of refugees receiving certain services from federal fiscal 2010 through 2014.

Exhibit 1
Services Provided by the Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees
Federal Fiscal 2010-2014

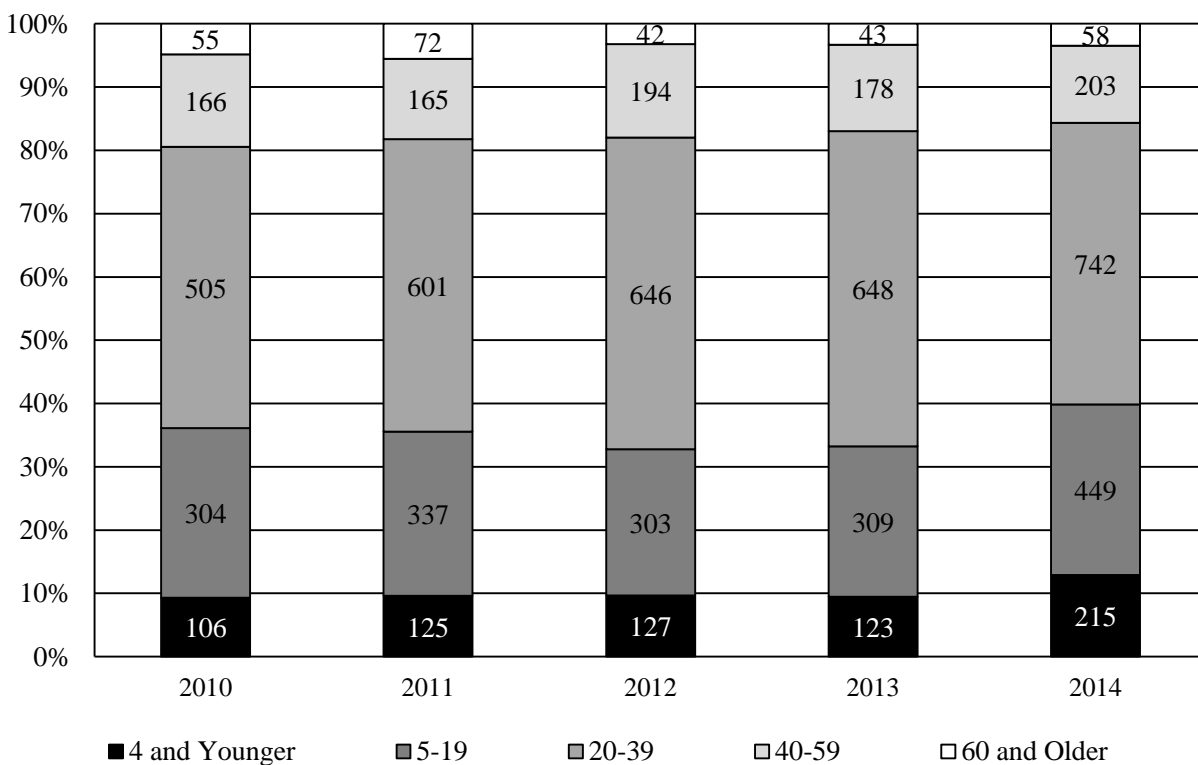


Source: Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees, Department of Human Resources

Education of Refugee Students

As shown in **Exhibit 2**, while the majority of refugees resettled in Maryland from federal fiscal 2010 through 2014 were ages 20 to 39, more than one-quarter (25.3%) were school aged (age 5 to 19), with an additional 10.4% younger than age 5. Under State law, all individuals, including refugees, between the ages of 5 and 20 may attend public primary or secondary schools free of charge. Federal law requires local school systems to provide English learner students with equal access to high-quality education, and local school systems may not discriminate in enrolling students based on national origin, citizenship, or immigration status. Many local school systems partner with community programs to provide comprehensive services to immigrant students such as after school tutoring, counseling, and parental support.

Exhibit 2
Refugees Resettled in Maryland by Age
Federal Fiscal 2010-2014



Source: Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees, Department of Human Resources

Financial support for public schools in Maryland is a shared State and local responsibility, with the federal government providing support for specific programs. All students are included in the State education funding formulas. The formulas provide additional per pupil funding for the costs associated with providing services to three at-risk student populations: special education students, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and students with limited English proficiency. In fiscal 2016, the federal government provided Maryland local school systems with \$9.3 million to supplement development of required English proficiency programs and \$98,520 to provide immigrant services in jurisdictions with an increase in the number of immigrants over the prior year.

Future Refugees in Maryland

The U.S. Department of State anticipates increasing the number of refugees admitted to the United States in the coming year due to the ongoing refugee crisis in Syria, some portion of which could be resettled in Maryland. At the time of writing, MORA had anticipated that Maryland would receive 2,100 refugees during federal fiscal 2016, 1,058 refugees who have a tie to the United States (family already resettled) and 1,035 refugees who have no tie to the United States. No specific figures about the number of refugees anticipated from Syria are available. However, Maryland has received 33 Syrian refugees through August 31, 2015. It should be further noted that following the terrorist attack on Paris on November 13, 2015, concerns were raised by numerous governors, including Governor Hogan, about resettlement of Syrian refugees specifically.