



# Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: Syrian refugee crisis

### **Why are Syrians fleeing?**

The Syrian conflict began in 2011. Since that time, more than 50% of the entire population of Syria has been displaced from their homes – by bombardment, civil war, and the growing threat of ISIS.

### **How many Syrian refugees are there?**

Prior to the war, the Syrian population was 23 million. Today, more than half of the pre-war population is in need of humanitarian assistance, whether they still remain in the country or have escaped across the borders. Currently, there are over 4 million registered Syrian refugees in countries neighboring Syria including Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and in several countries in North Africa. 76% of these refugees are women and children. Syrians now face increasing challenges to find safety and protection in these neighboring countries, which, faced with overwhelming refugee numbers, insufficient international support and security concerns, have taken measures this year to stem the flow of refugees – including restricting access or closer management of borders and introducing complex requirements for refugees to extend their stay.

### **Do all of the refugees live in camps?**

No. Only 12% of refugees across the region live in formal refugee camps. Most live in urban settings. In Jordan, the situation for more than 520,000 Syrians living outside the country's refugee camps is increasingly dire. A recent UNHCR assessment showed that 86% of those in urban and rural areas are now living below the poverty line and are taking increasingly extreme measures in order to cope, such as reducing their food intake or sending family members – including children – out to beg.

### **Why would anyone remain in Syria; can't they leave?**

The majority of refugees in Jordan and Lebanon lack the financial resources to contemplate the costly and dangerous journey to Europe. But some refugees, who have grown so desperate and have no hope left, risk everything by making a perilous journey by boat to try to reach a future in Europe. In 2015, more than 2,500 refugees died in the Mediterranean attempting this journey.

### **Now that European countries have offered support, will the US open its door to Syrian refugees?**

Each year the President of the United States authorizes the admission of a certain number of refugees into the country. This determination is based on a consultative process between Congress, the President and various federal agencies. The United States has a proud tradition of leading the world in the number of refugees resettled each year. In recent years, the U.S. has accepted between 50,000 to 75,000 refugees per year. In September 2015, the US announced that it will accept 85,000 refugees in 2016, including 10,000 from Syria.

### **Is it sufficient for the U.S. to admit only 10,000 refugees, especially considering the millions who are fleeing?**

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service stands with the Refugee Council USA, a coalition of non-profits working for refugees of which LIRS is a member, [in calling for](#) the United States government to resettle 100,000 Syrian refugees in fiscal year 2016. This is in addition to our urgent call for the admission of 100,000 refugees from other countries (an increase over the 70,000 in FY2015 and the 85,000 announced for FY 2016). (Source: RCUSA letter to President Obama).

### **What about security – are there safeguards in place to screen Syrian refugees who are entering the U.S.?**

Before admission to the U.S., each refugee undergoes an extensive interviewing, screening and security [clearance process](#) administered by the Department of Homeland Security. The waiting period for refugees be resettled in the US or other countries can be as long as 10 years.

### **How many Syrians have been resettled in the US so far?**

From 2011-2014, the US only resettled 172 Syrians. In FY 2015, that number has increased to 1,253 Syrians (as of August 31) but the U.S. expects to resettle 10,000 in FY 2016.

### **Has LIRS already helped to resettled Syrian refugees?**

Yes, as the second largest refugee resettlement organization in the US, LIRS and its partners are already welcoming hundreds of Syrian refugees who have often waited for resettlement to the U.S. for several years already. They are already demonstrating their ability to succeed in their new homes, bolstered by the welcome and support they receive from local congregations and communities that are helping them start their new lives.

### **What can I do to help?**

- Print, sign and collect signatures on the [LIRS petition](#) urging President Obama to increase the number of Syrian refugees the US will receive.
- Designate a Sunday this fall or winter to observe [Refugee Sunday](#). Free materials include a video featuring the story of a Syrian refugee who is now safe in the U.S., and LIRS can help provide a speaker.
- Pray for Syrian refugees (the Refugee Sunday kit includes a worship guide and litany).
- Volunteer with our local refugee resettlement [partner](#) in your community. Help sponsor a family, collect furniture and material goods, be a mentor, or welcome new arrivals at the airport.
- Help support all of LIRS's work with refugees here: [LIRs.org/supportsyria](http://LIRs.org/supportsyria). Your gift will enable us to continue advocating with the White House and Congress to admit more Syrian refugees and also help us to provide essential support to refugees when they arrive to safety in the U.S.
- For questions, ideas, or to volunteer to assist Syrian refugees, contact LIRS toll free at 844-230-2736 or [outreach@lirs.org](mailto:outreach@lirs.org).