An Overview of Refugee and Asylum Statistics in the United States

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Introduction

- Current refugee crisis impacting Europe and the rest of the world

- U.S. has increased annual quota from 70,000 in 2015 to 100,000 in 2017

- U.S. Census Bureau does not collect data on refugees, but rather data come from a number of administrative sources

Some questions

- How does the U.S. defines refugees/asylees for legal and statistical purposes?

- What data sources are available?

- What is the relationship between refugees and net international migration (NIM) estimates produced by the U.S. Census Bureau?

- What are some possible strategies to use Census data to analyze the refugee population?
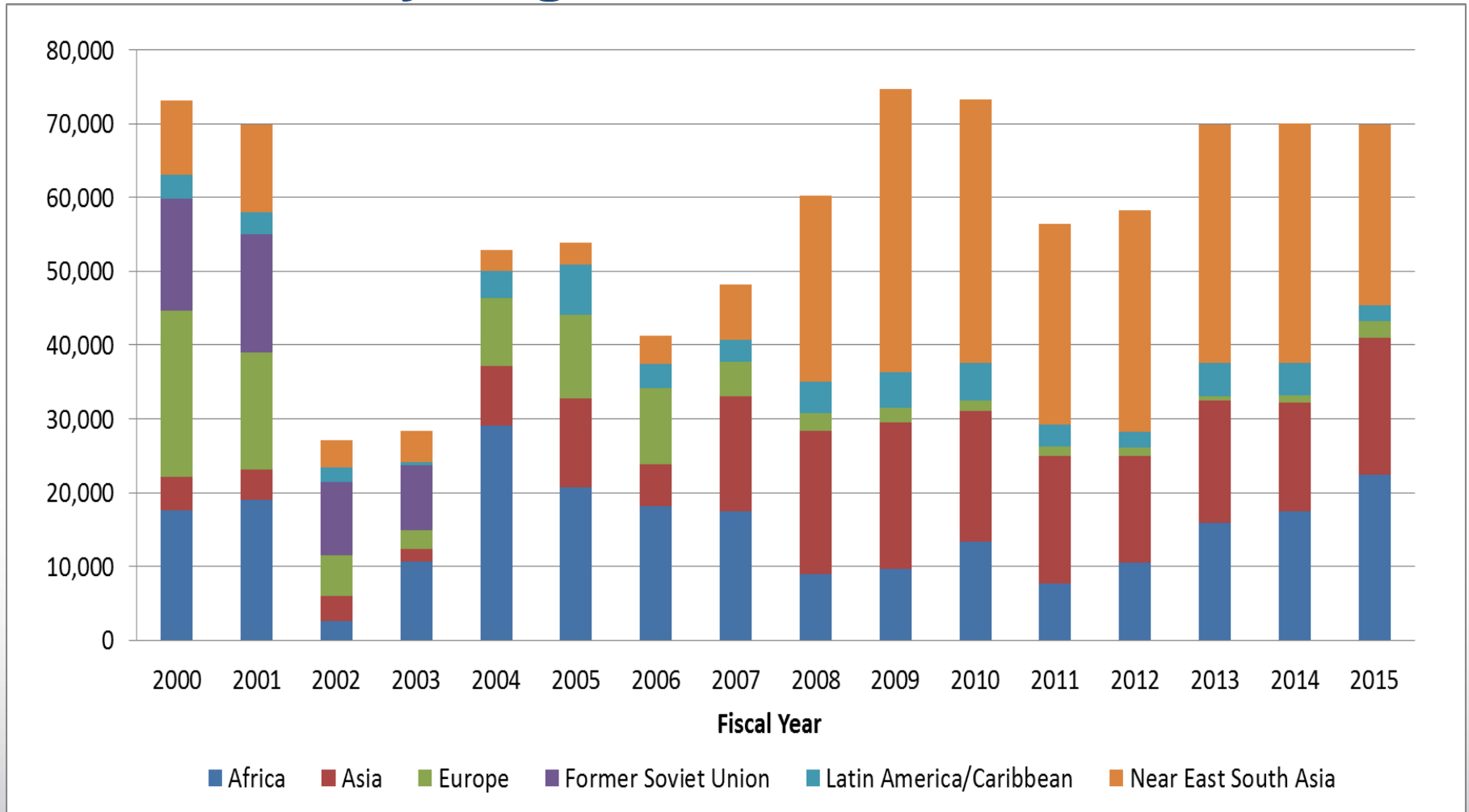
U.S. definitions of refugees and asylees

- Immigration and Nationality Act
  - The United States provides refuge to persons who are unable or unwilling to return to their country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion

- Two main forms of humanitarian protection
  - Refugee resettlement
    - Transfer of refugees from a country in which they have sought protection to a third country
    - Refugee status has already been determined by another organization (e.g. UNCHR)
    - U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
      - Number accepted annually determined by Executive order
      - 18-24 months or longer from referral to arrival in the United States.
  - Asylum status
    - Protection granted at port of entry or after already in country
    - U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)
      - No limit on number asylum grants in a given year
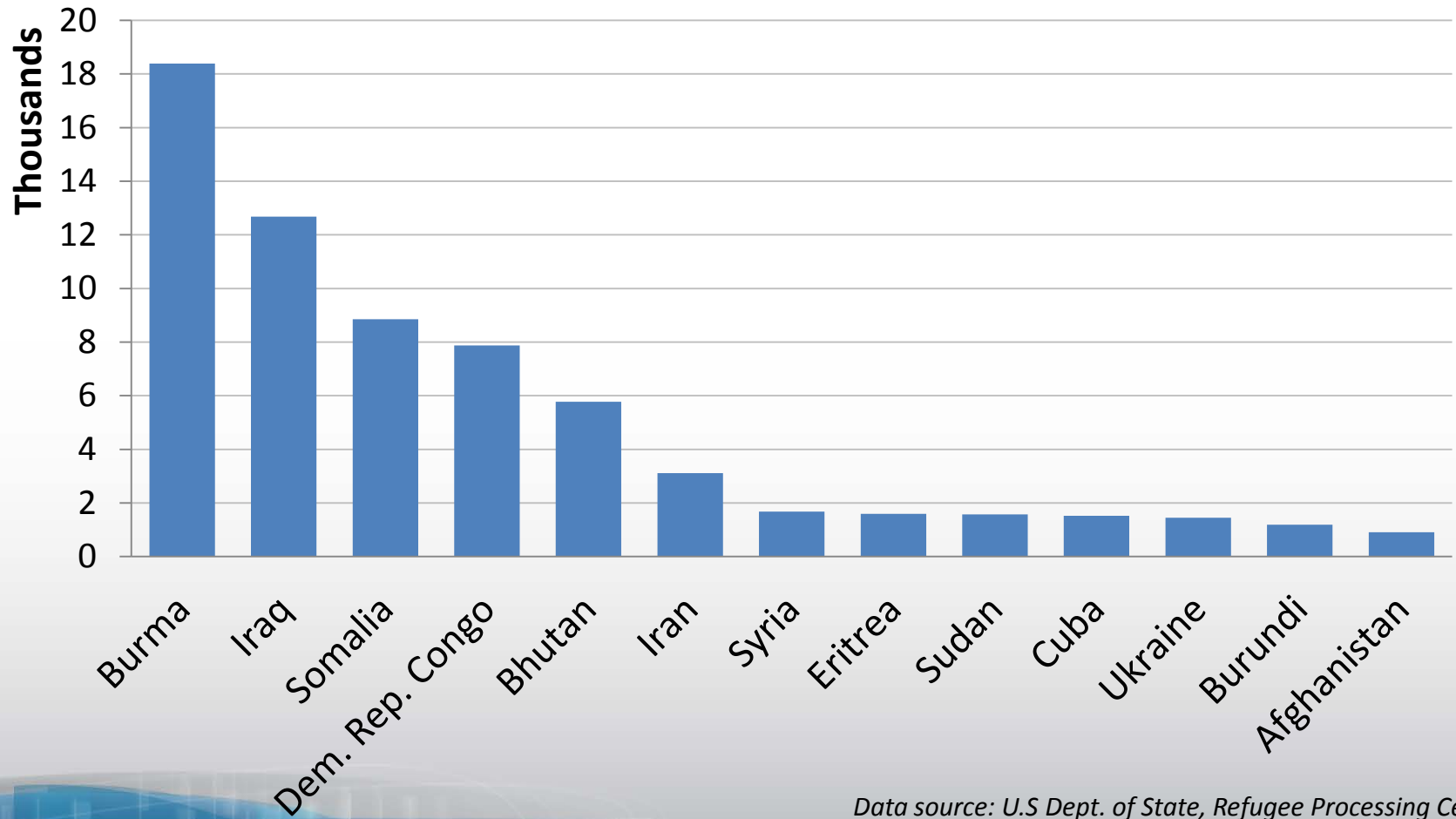
Administrative data

- Refugee admissions: State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
    - Refugee Processing Center (RPC) website
        - Released quarterly during fiscal year
    - Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS)
        - Additional characteristics collected during the resettlement application process from a variety of sources
            - Age, sex, native language, English language proficiency, and education
- Asylum grants: Department of Justice (DOJ)
    - Published annually by DHS
- Refugees & asylees: US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
    - Employment outcomes, program use, access to health care, secondary migration, etc.

Number of Refugee Admissions to the United States by Region: Fiscal Year 2000-2015
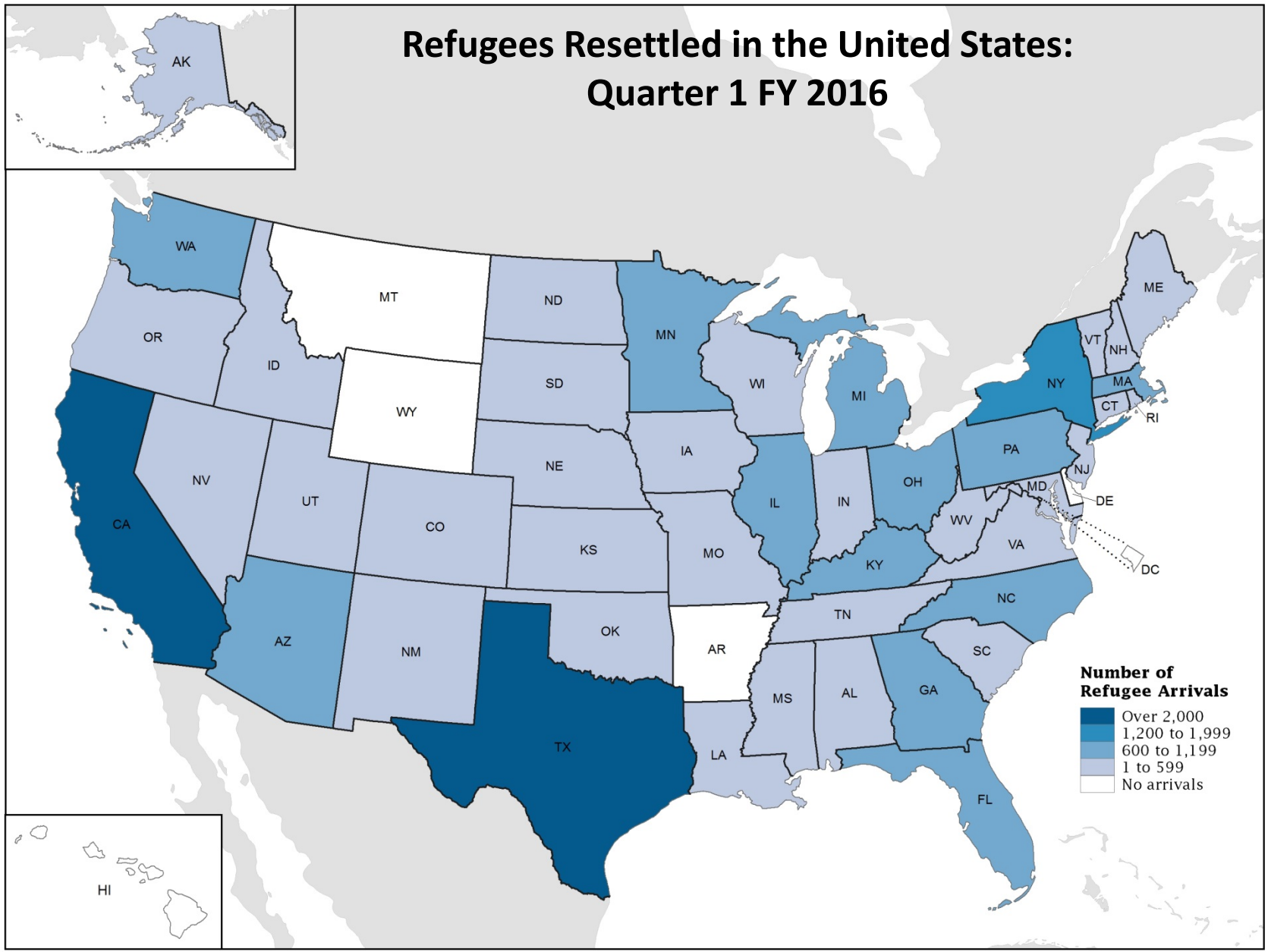

Data source: U.S Dept. of State, Refugee Processing Center

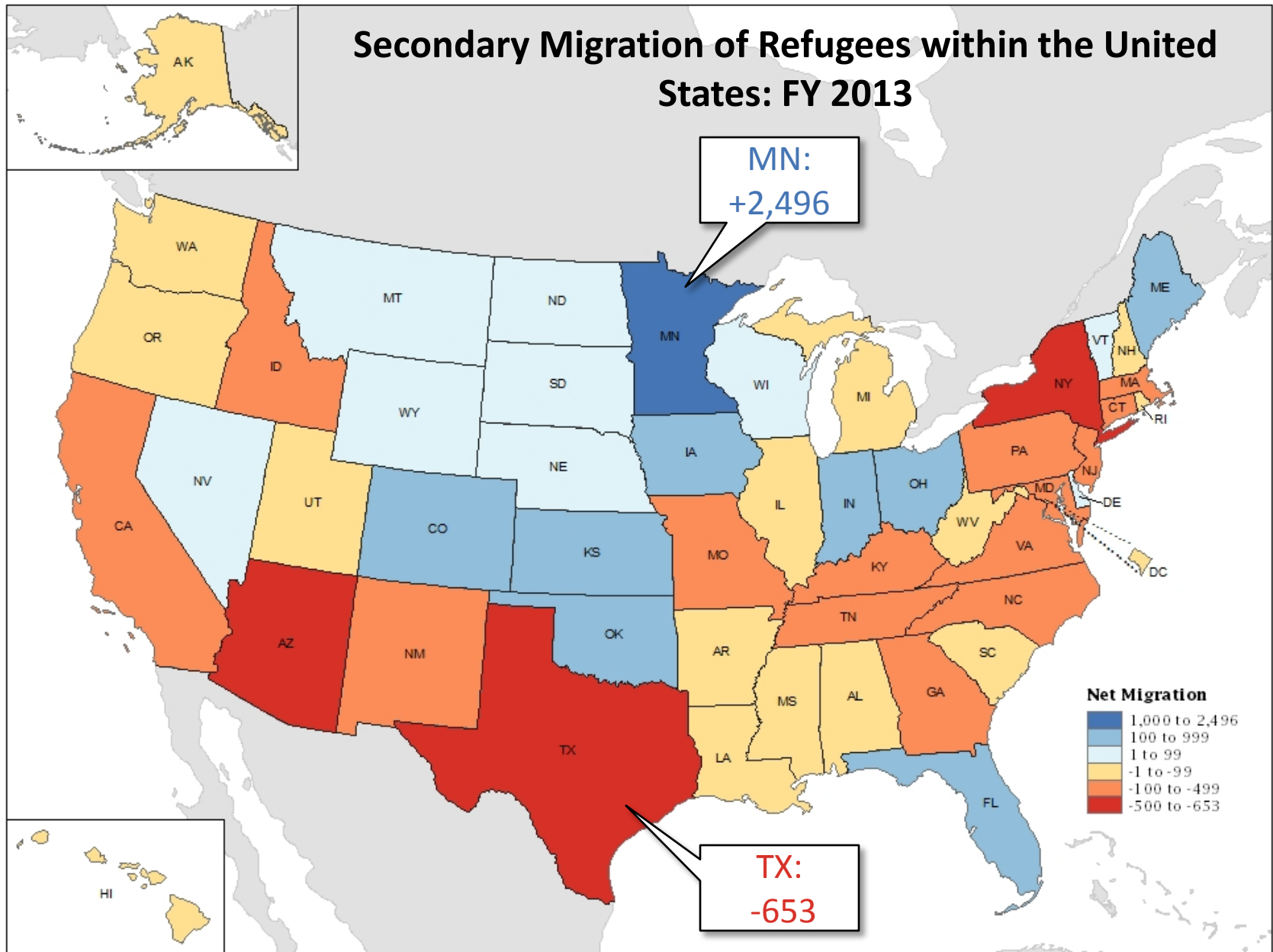**Top Countries of Chargeability for Resettlement of Refugees in the United States: FY 2015**

Data source: U.S Dept. of State, Refugee Processing Center

Refugees Resettled in the United States: Quarter 1 FY 2016

Number of Refugee Arrivals

- Over 2,000
- 1,200 to 1,999
- 600 to 1,199
- 1 to 599
- No arrivals

Data source: U.S Dept. of State, Refugee Processing Center

Secondary Migration of Refugees within the United States: FY 2013

MN: +2,496

TX: -653

Net Migration
- 1,000 to 2,496
- 100 to 999
- 1 to 99
- -1 to -99
- -100 to -499
- -500 to -653

Data source: US Dept. of Health and Human Services, Statistical Abstract for Refugee Resettlement Stakeholders (July 2014)

U.S. Census data on refugees

- The Census Bureau does not provide estimates of the number refugees

- American Community Survey (ACS)
  - Major source of immigration data
    - 3.5 million households surveyed per year
    - Country of birth, country of previous residence, year of entry, etc.
    - 1-year (national) and 5-year files (subnational) to produce estimates

- Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)
  - Immigration status when moved to US (though refugee status is not publically released)

Comparison of ACS and State Department data on refugee origin countries in a given year

- ACS provides a "ceiling" of the maximum number of refugees from a country
  - Fiscal year vs Calendar year (Year of Entry)
  - Country of chargeability vs country of birth
- 2014 1-year ACS file
  - Sample too small for specific refugee populations?
- 2010-2014 ACS 5-year file (smaller groups)
  - "Year of entry" bias for earlier years in combined file
  - Heaping around 2010

Refugees that entered the United States in 2013 from select Countries of Chargeability/Birth

Country	Refugee Processing Center	1-Year ACS		Percent Difference
		Estimate	Margin of Error	
Iraq	19,488	18,870	5,203	-3.2
Burma	16,299	7,710	1,984	-52.7
Bhutan	9,134	4,830	1,739	-47.1
Somalia	7,608	5,185	2,278	-31.8
Cuba	4,205	44,950	5,965	967.9
Iran	2,578	12,265	2,525	375.7
Dem. Rep. Congo	2,563	1,615	1,281	-37.1
Sudan	2,160	1,665	782	-23.0
Eritrea	1,824	1,815	1,140	-0.4
Ethiopia	765	11,340	2,784	1,382.2

Data source: 2014 ACS 1-year file; U.S. Dept. of State, Refugee Processing Center FY 2013

Refugees that entered the United States in 2009 from select Countries of Chargeability/Birth

Country	Refugee Processing Center	5-Year ACS		Percent Difference
		Estimate	Margin of Error	
Iraq	18,838	21,760	2,146	15.5
Burma	18,202	12,470	1,186	-31.5
Bhutan	13,452	11,805	1,404	-12.2
Iran	5,381	12,930	1,362	140.3
Cuba	4,800	32,700	2,396	581.3
Somalia	4,189	3,215	687	-23.2
Eritrea	1,571	1,600	462	1.9
Vietnam	1,538	24,830	1,761	1,514.4
Dem. Rep. Congo	1,135	1,500	402	32.1

Data source: 2010-2014 ACS 5-year file; U.S. Dept. of State, Refugee Processing Center FY 2009

Methods to assign "refugee status" using Census data

- ACS method: country of birth and year of arrival
  - Provides "ceiling"
- Urban Institute
  - "All or nothing": ID countries with a majority of refugees vs. total immigrants (LPR, asylees and refugees)
    - Impute refugee status based on "refugee origin" countries
  - Adjust by demographic estimates, region of origin, and receipt of benefits
- Migration Policy Institute (MPI)
  - "All or nothing": ID countries where RPC number exceeds ACS by 40% for refugees, or DOJ number exceeds ACS by 20% for asylees
    - Impute refugee status based on "refugee" or "asylee" origin countries
- Survey questions
  - SIPP

SIPP

- Longitudinal survey of 50,000 households
- New panels normally every 2-5 years
  - Most recent 2014 (2008 previous)
- Includes "Migration History" questions
- "When moved to United States to live, what was immigration status?
  - "Granted refugee status or granted asylum"
- Can be used to follow refugees over time

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2008 SIPP results

- 1.7 million identified as refugees/asylees
    - 5% of all those who moved to the US from abroad
- Come from variety of countries, but largest number from Cuba
- Annual flows (YOE) between 70,000 and 105,000
- Sample too small to yield useful results by flows or individual countries, though could combine YOE and COB to look at refugee stock for analytical purposes

Limitations

- Quality of administrative data?
  - Fiscal Year vs Calendar Year
  - Country of chargeability vs country of birth
- ACS "Ceiling"
- "All-or-Nothing" country approach
  - Miss many who are, include many who are not
- ACS/SIPP data issues
  - Sample size for small groups
  - Coverage and non-response
  - "Year of Entry" question limitations
    - Recall bias, proxy respondents, question understanding
      - First or most recent entry?
    - Heaping (decades, e.g. 2000, 2010)
    - Combining ACS annual files with YOE (censoring)

Relationship between U.S. Census Bureau population estimates and refugees

- Produce annual subnational population estimates, for which the NIM component is an important factor for growth or decline
- Occasional requests to adjust population estimates by refugee component (e.g. population count challenges)
- NIM estimates are primarily derived from ACS data
  - Refugees are implicitly included in these estimates
  - Currently not possible to separate refugees from NIM component

Possible methods to measure refugees with U.S. Census Bureau data

- Add survey questions for direct measurement
  - "Reason for Move" or "Immigration Status"
- Link RPC administrative data to Census survey data
  - Refugees eligible to apply for SSN upon arrival and begin work
- Modeling through RPC administrative data
  - Use characteristics of refugees (age, sex, country of origin) to impute/assign refugee status to ACS data

Discussion

- Need to improve measurement of refugees and asylum seekers: characteristics and long-term integration
  - UN Working Group developing handbook on refugee and IDP statistics
- U.S. Census Bureau investigating ways to disaggregate refugees from our estimates
  - Statistics derived from administrative data collected by different federal agencies
  - Measure refugees without double counting them
  - Comparability issues between administrative refugee and U.S. Census data
    - Variations in year, countries of origin, undercoverage for some specific refugee populations in the ACS, etc.
- Without a national population register, no simple way to identify and link individuals between data sources
  - Assign refugee status to individuals rather than to all migrants coming from specific countries
  - Potential to link administrative data to individual ACS records or use detailed characteristics from administrative data to impute refugee status on ACS records
    - Methods need more development before future implementation

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