An Overview of Refugee and Asylum Statistics in the United States

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This presentation is released to inform interested parties of ongoing research and to encourage discussion of work in progress. Any views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.
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. define 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

[Bar chart showing the number of refugee admissions by region from 2000 to 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

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

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

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

Data source: 2014 ACS 1-year file; U.S. Dept. of State, Refugee Processing Center FY 2013
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Refugee Processing Center</th>
<th>5-Year ACS Estimate</th>
<th>Margin of Error</th>
<th>Percent Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>18,838</td>
<td>21,760</td>
<td>2,146</td>
<td>15.5</td>
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<td>Burma</td>
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<td>Bhutan</td>
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<td>1,404</td>
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<td>Iran</td>
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<td>12,930</td>
<td>1,362</td>
<td>140.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
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<td>32,700</td>
<td>2,396</td>
<td>581.3</td>
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<td>Somalia</td>
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<td>3,215</td>
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<td>-23.2</td>
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<td>Eritrea</td>
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<td>1.9</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
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<td>24,830</td>
<td>1,761</td>
<td>1,514.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dem. Rep. Congo</td>
<td>1,135</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
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
Acknowledgements

- Anthony Knapp, Net International Migration Branch
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