

## Fact Sheet

### Immigration in Oregon's Cities

#### Portland, Salem, and Medford

- Immigrants come to this country with their own funding and the support of family and friends who may already be living here. Refugees are admitted to the United States under the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980. They must document that are escaping political, religious, or racial persecution by the government of their own country. Economic deprivation is not considered justifiable basis for granting refugee status. Asylum seekers apply for asylee status upon arriving in the U.S. They must prove that they fear religious, political, or racial persecution in their homeland to receive asylum benefits.
- Since the 1980s Portland, Salem, and Medford are home to many Latino immigrants, and also to refugees from Southeast Asia, the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, the Middle East, and Africa.
- Spanish-speaking immigrants, primarily of Mexican origin, are the most numerous newcomers in Salem and Medford. Besides Latinos, the Portland metropolitan area is home to Asians and Southeast Asians, people from Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sudan, and refugees from Russia and Ukraine.
- Koreans initially arrived as refugees and settled in Portland, Salem, Corvallis, Eugene and Springfield. Other Asian groups (from Hong Kong, China, The Philippines, Japan, Singapore, and Malaysia) settled in urban areas. Young and well-educated Indians came to work in Portland and Salem's high tech industries.

#### Refugee Resettlement and Networks

- Refugee resettlement agencies in Portland—such as the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) and community sponsors, and activist ethnic and religious networks in Salem, have played an important role in bringing refugees to Oregon. Ultimately, the US government's family reunification policies determine what kinds of refugees gain admittance.
- Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Mien victims of the Vietnam War were the first refugee groups resettling in Oregon starting in the mid-1970s. Supported by the Asian Family Center, today's Southeast Asian population in Portland is more than 40,000.
- Other refugees from Thailand and Myanmar (Burma) arrived later. In 2007, about 500 Burmese escaped from civil war and an oppressive military government. These agrarian people are finding their new lives in urban Oregon challenging and confusing. In an effort to ease the adjustment of new arrivals, Cambodians and other Southeast Asians are building a Buddhist Cultural Center in Beaverton.
- There are several hundred different ethnic groups and national groups from Africa residing in Portland. The first to relocate in Oregon were from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Sudan. Recently, a group of Bantu resettled here. Christian Church congregations, the Africa House, and the Somali Cultural Center attract them to Portland. In Beaverton, a large mosque serves to those African refugees who are Moslem.
- The largest of all refugee groups are Russian-speaking Christians (Russian and Ukrainian Baptists, Pentecostals, and Seventh-Day Adventists) who left their homeland during the post-Cold War era. Russian Old Believers are the most distinctive of all Russian-speaking residents in the Willamette Valley. The Slavic Coalition provides a voice for the Russian-speaking community and advocates for youth, families, and the elderly.

#### New Patterns of Refugee Resettlement

- Recent federal legislation allowed admission from Africa, Myanmar (Burma) and the Middle-East due to political oppression. Oregon will likely receive more refugees from those regions in the future. These newest Oregonians, like others who have come before, will bring their skills, experiences, and cultures to enrich our state. They will also need support to accelerate their integration into the state's economy and society.